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THE WYE

UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME

GARDENS OF ENGLAND

By E. T. Cook

New Edition edited by E. T. Ellis, F.R.H.S. With 16 full-page illustrations in colour by Beatrice Parsons.

FLOWERS & GARDENS OF MADEIRA

By Florence du Cane

New Edition, with 16 full-page illustrations in colour by Ella du Cane.

AYRSHIRE IDYLLS

By Neil Munro

With 16 full-page illustrations in colour by George Houston, R.S.W.

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ABEREDW AND BLACK MOUNTAINS

THE WYE

BY

A. G. BRADLEY

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

SUTTON PALMER

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THE WYE

CHAPTER I

ITS MOUNTAIN SOURCES

From high Plinlimmon's shaggy side
Three streams in three directions glide;
To thousands at their mouth who tarry,
Honey, gold, and mead they carry.
Flow also from Plinlimmon high
Three streams of generosity;
The first a noble stream indeed
Like rills of Mona runs with mead;
The second bears from vineyards thick
Wine to the feeble and the sick;
The third till time shall be no more
Mingled with gold shall silver pour.

LEWIS GLYN COTHI (*trans.*).

FAR from the haunts of men, amid the shaggy solitudes where old Plinlimmon lifts her double crown, and cradled deep among the lonely hills, lies the birthplace of the Wye. From the foot of the mountain so famous in the stormy annals of old Wales, and entrenched as it were in the heart of the wilderness, there burst out the infant springs of two famous rivers and of a third renowned for

the beauty of its brief career. The romantic fact of the Wye and Severn, springing as they do from the same mountain side to meet again as big tidal rivers after such far-sundered, protracted, and eventful wanderings through Wales and England, is familiar to every one.

As if the Wye, blessed above all rivers and through all its days, had not enough of fame, it breaks into the world, a tiny rill, in such fashion as to set all the bards singing, and even to fix the story of its birth on the reluctant mind of countless schoolboys. Strangers not a few make the long and trackless pilgrimage to the wild glens where, almost within shouting distance of one another, the triple streams—the Rheidol completing the trio—leaving the bosom of this great mother of waters, head for such different worlds. The disciple of Borrow will remember how that inimitable soul took his hat off above the springs of Wye, and, lifting up his voice, sang to the winds and to his astonished guide his own quite admirable translation of Lewis Glyn Cothi's well-known lines.

Plinlimmon is not a popular mountain, except in geography books, which till quite recently misled generations of British youth with the preposterous assertion that it was the third highest in the Prin-

cipality, whereas there are several, even in South Wales, of considerably greater altitude. But the ingenuous geographer, though ridiculous as a statistician, was dumbly and half consciously, and with vague intentions, groping after something like the truth. If importance had been substituted for elevation he was not so far astray in his appraisement of this lonely humpy mass of the oldest rock in Britain and almost in the world. For Plinlimmon throws up a great barrier between the mountains of the north that every one knows and the mountains of the south that no one knows. The tourist on the high and familiar ranges of Merioneth sees its rounded masses looming far to the southward, bounding his horizon, and turns homeward with the fixed impression that it is the last effort of the Welsh mountains, and that beyond it is a low-pitched country of no particular character and no especial interest. His guide-book will probably encourage this delusion by including a chapter on Plinlimmon as if it were an accessory of North Wales and the end of all things mountainous, whereas it actually belongs to another group and formation, and is the beginning of another wilderness.

I have said that Plinlimmon is not a popular

mountain. It is neither precipitous in form nor very handy to any places of resort. But the man who takes the trouble to ascend it, if he have a soul within him or eyes in his head, will surely understand why these uplifted solitudes have so impressed themselves on Welsh topography and history as to befool the incautious writer of less recent Saxon text-books. The mountain has two summits, the higher and rounder one to the westward in Cardiganshire, the bolder and cone-shaped peak in Montgomery. Visitors for the most part ascend the former, where three cairns mark the goal of their achievement and the respectable altitude of 2460 feet. The other is a trifle lower, but it is beneath it that the Wye and her companions spring, and the prospect from either is equally sublime. They are a mile apart, and a long drooping shoulder unites them. Out of the dark spongy brow of this high trackless pass comes leaping impetuously a mountain torrent to cleave the rapidly deepening vale that divides the sister hills. This is the Tarenig that might fairly urge, if tradition had not otherwise decreed, an equal claim to be the *fons et origo* of the Wye: for, where the two streams unite four miles below, there is not a pin to choose between them. But the Tarenig

has distinction enough of its own. For it divides the shires of Cardigan and Montgomery, and thus incidentally North Wales from South in the modern acceptation, as in the sanguinary days of old it parted the land of Ceredigion and the loose confederacy of South Wales from their most neighbourly foes, the Chiefs of Upper Powys, a much more serious affair. There was bad blood always about these vast sheep-walks of Plinlimmon, and plenty of it was shed. Whether this twin sister of the infant Wye was held in the respect accorded it by the ancient lawyers matters nothing. For many a day now its sole mission has been to break with its hoarse voice the eternal silence of these long, brown, mountain slopes.

The old Aberystwith coach road, narrow enough in parts, but beautifully graded, and still maintained as a highway from Central Wales to the coast of Cardigan, runs up the Wye, and finally up its southern fork, the Tarenig, till it mounts on to the knees of Plinlimmon, where, at the Eisteddfa-curig, a lonely farm-house, it tops the watershed at a height of 1350 feet above the sea. This is the starting-point for either summit, and a couple of miles, much of it over bogs and peat-holes, will land the traveller upon them. It is to the

Montgomery peak, however, that the traveller with the Wye in mind will turn his steps, for it is immediately beneath it that the famous river issues from its natal spring. But the outlook from this high pinnacle in the very heart of Wales will assuredly banish for the moment all thoughts of the mere birthplace of streams. In clear weather the secrets of half wilder Wales are here laid bare from north to south, and of her western coasts from Carnarvon's long, outstretched arm of Lleyn, clenching its iron fist where the currents lash it around the Isle of Saints, to the far-protruding capes of Pembroke.

But even so I am not sure that I would not as soon recall this same scene from the Wye's parent hill as it comes back in the half gloom of a wild October day; a fortunate interval, a brief truce kept in sullen and lowering fashion between days, nay weeks of elemental fury almost unprecedented within memory. Rivulets were bursting in all directions from this spongy aerial watershed. To the hoarse roar of the Tarenig in its rocky channels a hundred thin streams responded from quaking, bright-green ledges, and piped on in minor key down black peaty furrows to the vale. The great mountain, great that is in its extent and its desola-

tion, was sad and sombre, and looked the part that old-time writers, with a half-shudder, have always loved to invest it. "The voluptuary will find little to detain him in these regions," writes one of these delightfully ingenuous souls a hundred years ago. The bloom of the heather was long past. Any lingering bog flowers had no doubt been beaten into the ground; the bracken had lost the ruddy gold of autumn and had turned a russet brown. The migrant birds — the dunlin, the whinchat, the wheatear, the curlew, the ring-ouzel—had all fled the mountain. An odd grouse or two, caught napping, sprang more than once within half gunshot, or a kestrel hovered over its depleted hunting-ground. One kept an open eye, and with reason, for a kite, a buzzard, or a raven; for there are more of these fast-vanishing species left in the mountain solitudes of South Wales than in any other part of wilder Britain outside the Scottish Highlands. But there was little life in the waste to-day, as I picked my upward way over brown quaking bogs and thin jets of crystal water swishing over bright strips of emerald moss. There was as much stir, however, in the heavens above as in the waters beneath. Dark clouds raced before a fresh, south-west wind, just clear,

as the luck of the moment would have it, of the mountain tops. The sheep with their white rain-soaked fleeces had gathered on the hard green sward about the heights, and a human form silhouetted against the wild sky on the very crown of the mountain, suggested the fancy that some belated tourist from Dovey side had also braved the dubious enterprise. But the distant clamour of dogs and the rush of a little cloud of white specks down the breast of the hill, dispelled the unlikely thought and solved the simple problem.

The prospect upon this dark October noon from the brow of Plinlimmon will be longer remembered than many a fair-weather outlook, when whole counties have been spread like a tinted map beneath me. Murk clouds rolled up in big battalions from the Irish Sea, just clearing for the most part the summits of the mountain ranges that lowered mysteriously to the north and south. A great steely gleam of sunless light, expanding and contracting to the westward, as the dark vapours shifted—a weird medley of sheen and shadow—represented the Irish Sea, while the lofty outlines of Pembroke's rugged shore, the southern horn of Cardigan Bay, thrust their dim sombre shapes far out into the deep. But more striking

yet, as seen from here, were the long wild ridges, which, like a dark and troubled sea, rolled southwards for some thirty miles by the crow's flight—and far more by surface measurement. But no man, no tourist, at any rate, ever penetrates these hills. For this is the great mountain wilderness of South Wales, shared by the counties of Radnor, Cardigan, Brecon, and Carmarthen, which, as I have already hinted, no Englishmen to speak of, and very few Welshmen, know. A glorious solitude spreading from far away in the south up here to the foot of Plinlimmon, and covering many hundred square miles of crag and torrent, of heath and bog and green sheep walk. Out of its heart come some of the Wye's lustiest feeders. The Towy, too, and the Teify, with their score of boisterous tributaries, are cradled here. On the slopes of the mountains, beneath the screes and crags of old Silurian rock or on the bracken-covered face of the less precipitous hills, hardy sheep and hardier ponies wax fat in summer or struggle through the winter storms. Here, as any ornithologist of repute will tell you, the fast vanishing of the nobler birds of prey—the kite, the buzzard, and the raven—are making their last stand in any appreciable degree. And this because there are

scarcely any keepers, the grouse being too few and widely distributed to be worth it, and no people but sheep-farmers, whose scattered homesteads lie for the most part near the outer edges of the waste, and whose large flocks keep their ranges by custom without fence or wall. It used to be said that you might travel the forty miles from Plinlimmon southward to the Sugar Loaf above Llandovey without encountering wall or fence. I have some reason to think the local saying still practically holds good. Giraldus Cambrensis tells us that in his day (the twelfth century) this region was called "the mountains of Elynedd," and by the Normans "the Moruge." In those warlike times they were great military factors in the defence of Wales, and needed some concrete definition. They have nowadays none at all. And this is a strange situation for a mountain wilderness into which Dartmoor and Exmoor could be together comfortably dropped. On this day I could look southward beneath the wracking clouds whose gloom they sullenly gave back, over ridge upon ridge, shoulder upon shoulder, to their farthest bounds. But to the northward there was still heavier murk. For the Cader range rose mysterious, black, and shadowy beyond the Dovey, out of a foreground of

almost impenetrable gloom. But all the nearer wild land of lone moors, stretching from our mountain's foot towards Machynlleth, lay in a strange white light, and the little lakes upon its surface shone with the same steely gleam that lit the visible portions of the Irish Sea. The Rheidol, even so near its source, poured in full and brimming current seaward through the russet bog-land, a thousand feet beneath us. The Severn, or the Hafren, which is its cradle name, streamed eastward through a no less lonely glen, and headed for Llanidloes, while the Wye itself, just loosed from the actual side of the mountain, sped down rejoicing on its winding course to its junction with the Tarenig by the Aberystwith road, where it first encounters the fringe of civilisation.

The pleasures of this wild, windy noontide on the mountain-top were not wholly without alloy. The heavens to the westward kept threatening portentous things, and it was a season of altogether intemperate performance that will not soon be forgotten. I had stolen up here in a brief lull, but now the patchy glints of the distant sea had been swallowed up in curtains of advancing gloom that came on at an intimidating pace. Flakes of fleecy cloud were already drifting beneath my feet and

ominous drops of rain came spattering with them. There are no precipices on Plinlimmon, and though the awful warnings of the ancients and of some later guide-books against being caught in a mist on what they term its "savage wastes" might be applicable to some quite unsophisticated wight, discomfort and delay is the worst that could overtake the veriest stranger who has an elementary knowledge of mountains, when the wind is in the west. When it blows from the north, however, and cold snow-storms are afoot, as they sometimes are even in late October, more may happen at this altitude, and in a very short time, than is perhaps conceivable to those who have not been exposed to such undesirable conditions.

But nothing untoward, it would be superfluous to remark, occurred on this occasion. It only remains to be told that it was up here on Plinlimmon, above the source of the Wye, that Owen Glyndwr in 1401 unfurled the dragon standard of Wales, and formally commenced those years of devastating war which embittered the life and hastened, no doubt, the death of Henry IV., and first taught his famous son that trade of arms which he turned on the fields of France to such account. It was a well-chosen spot for testing

the force of patriotic feeling in both North and South Wales, and a dramatic perch for the hero, who did well to encourage the conviction of his enemies that he could call spirits to his aid from the vasty deep and use the lightning and the tempest as his instruments. He was attacked here by a strong force of Anglo-Flemings from Pembrokeshire, and the first battle of the war was fought on the slopes of Mynydd Hedgant.

From the top of the pass into Cardiganshire, the Steddfa-curig (the resting-place of St. Curig), the lonely highway cut into the mountain side descends the winding glen of the Tarenig to its junction with the Wye, which last comes leaping out of its own vale to the meeting-place, where an enclosed homestead marks the first sign of civilisation. Five miles beyond is the village of Llangurig, a noted landmark in the secluded country where the Wye spends its earlier days. After the meeting of the waters, things change a little. The mountain glen becomes a normal valley. The waters no longer fret in pent-up rocky channels, but wind in gravelly streams and brown pools through fenced and level meads: the snug abodes of sheep farmers, whose white-washed walls, nestling beneath the shelter of oak or ash or sycamore, rest

at intervals upon the hill-foot. The accompanying road, too, now traces its way between the hedgerows of civilisation. But across the single breadth of meadow-land through which the shimmering river curves, and above the intermittent homesteads on their edge, the green walls of the wilderness, the great steeps under the lonely hinterland to the southward, bronzed here with bracken or flecked there with the white mountain sheep, spring high to heaven. There is none of the splendour here, to be sure, that we shall find the Wye gathering round its banks at lower stages. The hills, if they are wild and high, are of smooth and billowy surface. There are no woods yet of any consequence. But there is all that delightful sense of peace and aloofness from the world which a pastoral valley thrust into the heart of solitude inspires.

The highest reaches of a mountain-born river are, as a rule, their most impetuous. But there is slight promise here in these bright coils of gently-babbling, shallow, and smooth-gliding runs of the fury of the Wye's maturer days. It is curious, too, to remember that this narrow, and mostly rather indifferent, road which thus follows the Wye nearly to its source, and strides the high pass at Steddfa-curig, was for two generations the only

route to Aberystwith, which had become a place of consequence before railroads were, and long before they penetrated Wales. There are plenty of people in the valley still living who remember the four or five coaches that passed back and forth here in the day, laden with tourists of quite superior quality. But Aberystwith was still quite *comme il faut* as a romantic seaside resort when Queen Victoria came to the throne, as may be well imagined from the prodigious journey it entailed by coach and post-chaise to get there. For nearly fifty years after the railroad this disused artery relapsed into silence so far as any glimpses of the gay and outer world were concerned. The farmer's trap and saddle-pony became almost its sole frequenters. But it remained, as I can answer for, when cycling made its quality of some slight interest, a still admirable highway. To-day, however, something more than the old coaching traffic has returned, and its torn and indented surface is too eloquent of the motor traffic that follows this beautiful, and till lately sequestered, route to the west coast of Wales. But for nine months of the year something more than its ancient peace—for the scanty population has grown of late much scantier—rests upon these highest reaches of the

Wye. Here, as in many other parts of Central and West Wales, not merely the farmer on his pony, but the farmer's wife mounted likewise, and with market basket hooked on her arm, is still a common object of the highway.

The village of Llangurig, about half-way down the twenty miles of winding valley that form the first and quite distinct stage of the river's course, is now as ever the little metropolis of the vale. A trifling hamlet, with church and inns and a few dwellings, it is in itself of altogether cheerful aspect, and beautifully set near the banks of the Wye, where the valley expands a trifle and a dip in the hills upon its eastern bank lets in a highway from Llanidloes. It is named from the British Saint, St. Curig, which pious soul, like the reputed founder of so many little churches in the Welsh hills, was a missioner of the Early Church from Ireland or Brittany. He halted, it is said, at the head of the pass still commemorated in the name Steddfa-curig, and looked about him. If he was in quest of a wilderness well suited to the career of a hermit, his soul must have rejoiced within him. If, on the other hand, he had evangelising designs on the heathen, the outlook must have been dreary indeed. But he ultimately

selected the alluring spot that now bears his name, with small notion, one may well believe, of the deathless fame in store for him. For in the middle ages friars carried his image about under their coats and worked wonders with it. While to-day here we are talking about him, and should certainly hear of it if we failed to. If it is not impious to say so, surely the immortality of the comparatively insignificant is nowhere so conspicuous as is that of the early British evangelist! After fifteen hundred years, he is quietly and picturesquely in possession of Wales, and whatever may be the fate of the Welsh Church, all the thunders of the Free Churches combined will never dispossess a single Welsh Saint—that is quite certain.

Llangurig no longer merits the anathema of the benighted wayfarer, even if picturesque adventures ever fell to the lot of the modern tourist. On the contrary, it is a haven of blessed abode. For the late Mrs. Anwyl of the Black Lion, its presiding genius, was known to more than a generation of discriminating souls, and her traditions are still worthily maintained. The ancients, however, coming down-stream from Plinlimmon, are amusingly eloquent on the terrors of such hospitality as the mountain village then offered. Some seventy

years ago that excellent Itinerist, Thomas Roscoe, delighted with "the wild and magnificent scenery," flinched on a close acquaintance from the prospect of his intended night at Llangurig, and fled into the darkness and a ten-mile walk to Rhayader. In the street of the hamlet there is a monument erected by his tenantry to the Chevalier Lloyd, a former squire who rebuilt St. Curig's Church, which meritorious act local tradition has it that he was inspired to by an extraordinarily vivid dream.

And in regard to things mysterious and psychical, superstitions do really linger among these hills, and are not met much more than half-way, as one cannot help sometimes suspecting to be the case with ingenuous explorers of the rural districts. About and above Llangurig, too, the Welsh language still lingers, the old and middle-aged being infinitely happier in its use than in the Saesoneg. And only the sympathetic bilingual visitor who could deal with the elders on fluent and even terms would gain their confidence sufficiently to gather how robust is still the faith in corpse-candles (*canwyll corph*)—a Cardiganshire importation, by the way—in conjurers and sorcerers and charmers, all differing in their subtle shades of necromancy, and more fearsome still in the Evil Eye. It has

been happily given me to explore this source of the Wye with a friend who has the lingual key to these confessions in great perfection, and they proved many and interesting. We were pointed out a cottage on the mountain foot where the Evil Eye, though in declining strength, together with more useful magic arts, remained with a third generation. A rosy-faced old farmer described with animation how not very long ago his neighbour's horses suddenly lost the use of their limbs owing to this overlooking by a *cwtserwr*; the cure in this case was the hair of the dog that bit them, and it was not till a piece of paper with mystic numbers written on it had been procured from the author of the evil and waved over the incapacitated animals that they recovered, which they did with remarkable promptness. Another of many wonders imparted to us in the Welsh tongue by a second farmer was the strange case of a local matron, well known to him, who, after being given over for dead by the doctors on account of a dropsy, was miraculously cured by a "charmer," and became the mother of ten children. Authentic instances, too, were cherished of corpse-candles flickering in the dark from some neighbouring house towards the church, grim heralds of the

doom of some unsuspecting inmate. As this is a veracious narrative, I must admit that none of our acquaintances had personally encountered that fearful spectacle, the *Cyhyraeth*—that grizzly female who, with uplifted bony arms and the horrors of the grave upon her person, appears before the trembling rustic in some lonely spot as a herald of impending woe. Nor had any of them heard the howl of the *Cwn Annwn*, the dogs of the sky, who hunt departing souls across the midnight heavens with unearthly cry. This is probably because they are not quite Cardiganshire men, and not thereby privileged to see the demons which are the more especial appanage of that characteristic county and its supernatural atmosphere. The older people are quite mournful at the evident decline of the Welsh tongue in the valley. It is still the language of most households, but the children, alas, now "play in English," which is a sure sign of the beginning of the end in Wales.

There are one or two small lead-mines on the skirts of Plinlimmon to-day, as there have always been throughout this whole Silurian range. Nor have I particularly in mind the handful of individuals who find employment in them when my thoughts turn to the adventures of the innumerable

"salmons" who push their way up in autumn to spawn in these secluded waters. For the Welsh hill-farmer needs neither example nor instruction in the art of helping himself when the king of fishes, intent on matters domestic, makes his annual migration to the mountains. He is an incurable fish-poacher, if you like to put it that way, and the pastime is hereditary. In former times it was merely a question of helping himself to a change of diet, and taking toll for that purpose of a sea-fish that visited his waters. Unpardonable as this may seem in the abstract to the owners or lessees of salmon water, and assuredly illegal, most people are agreed that no serious damage was done. But of late years another spirit has entered into the salmon-snatcher, and there are possibly more experts at this business in the upper waters of the Wye and Severn than in any similar area in Great Britain. The stricter laws now in force, and the higher value attached to rod fishing, would seem, however illogically, to have aroused a certain bitterness among the peasantry, and fish are sometimes killed wholesale for spite, whereas in former days they were, as a rule, merely levied on for food. The feeling is strong too against the net fishermen at the mouth

of the rivers, who are looked on as the monopolists of fish that are bred in the upper waters.

It is just ten miles from Llangurig to Rhayader, and for the whole of them the road clings to the Wye. For most of the way the scenery is of the same delightful quality, nowhere grand, but that charming blend of the wild and the unconventionally domestic that has a place of its own in one's affections. The Wye itself, glistening in wayward fashion from one side of the valley to the other in all the gentler moods and fancies of a pellucid, hill-born trout-stream, is the best of company.

Small homesteads, whose chief concern lies in the flocks that range over the lofty hills which bound the valley, nestle in their snug canopy of leaves upon either hand, while on the lower slopes and the valley levels, meadow and hedgerow, tillage and woodland, gorse brake and bracken glade make constant variety. But always on the farther or western slope are those swelling green ramparts that mark the limits of the great solitude which gives such distinction and such charm to this little-known country whose mysterious inner sanctuaries appeal to the few who know them with a force emphasised beyond doubt by their entire exclusion from all ordinary survey and cognisance of British

Highlands. The angler, the deerstalker, the grouse-shooter have made the wildest districts and islands of Scotland a commercial asset, familiar in sporting circles and clubs, on hotel or land agents' lists. North Wales and the Lakes, the Yorkshire moors, Dartmoor, and Exmoor are the stamping-ground of thousands on different quests, and have no secrets left—either in practice or on paper. But the lone mountains of Elynedd, as Giraldus calls them, which incidentally swell the Wye from their abounding springs, are gloriously virgin. Even the South Welshmen, other than dwellers in the adjoining districts, who know these Highlands south of Plinlimmon are so few as scarcely to count. What wonder, then, that Englishmen know nothing of them, and that for the chance wight who is more fortunate, they have a singular fascination?

But if to the west and south of the Upper Wye is, in effect, the boundary of this silent uplifted land, the whole contiguous region of Montgomery and Radnor upon its left bank is no less mountainous and quite as beautiful. But then it seems, though perhaps capriciously, to belong to another system, rolling away over interminable miles to the northward, and bearing in its deep heart a score of tributaries that swell the infant Severn and belong

to the land of Powys and the lesser-known portions of North Wales.

As one draws towards Rhayader, stream and valley altogether change their character. There is no room any longer for meadow or homestead. Steep, shaggy, fern-clad, birch-sprinkled hills descend precipitously from rugged summits, and the Wye, now this long time growing gradually hoarser in its music, plunges impetuously down rocky channels, mantling with woods of oak and ash. Just here, where the Cambrian railway crosses the river, and the Marteg comes plashing with it from the northerly wilds of St. Harmons and Pantydwr, is the first note of that new kind of atmosphere which distinguishes the Wye upon a gradually expanding scale, and with few interruptions, for the next twenty-five miles.

Leading down through a narrow leafy trough, with the road running high above it, the Wye enters both Rhayader and what by comparison with its earlier surroundings may be called the world at the same time. The world of Radnorshire, to be sure, is not a congested one. In the whole county, which is not extraordinarily small in area, there are about eighteen thousand souls, the population of a good-sized country town. But the

NEAR RHAYADER

Wye, reinforced here by several feeders, makes a great advance in size and importance. It is henceforward well known of men, compared with its upper reaches. For it forms the main route between North and South Wales by means of the Cambrian railroad that follows near its banks, while a more imposing highway, along which a fair amount of local traffic moves and a good many strangers travel for the sake of the scenery, keeps in constant touch with it.

Rhayader, or, till the people of Radnor forgot their Welsh, Rhaiadr Gwy (the cataract of the Wye), is a little market-town of a thousand or so souls, and a quaint old house still peers here and there from among the commonplace which is chiefly noticeable. It has existed, of course, through all time mainly for the flocks upon its thousand hills, and if it wears a peaceful look in normal times, upon occasions it is a very pandemonium of sheep and cattle and ponies, of men and dogs. The situation, girdled with high and shapely hills, is beautiful. The falls which explain its name were virtually destroyed when the stone bridge was thrown across the river more than a century ago. But a salmon-ladder on the spot is perhaps even more interesting as the scene of many notorious

poaching affrays. If Rhayader is commonplace architecturally, it is so in nothing else. It has harboured, for one thing, as many daring fish-poachers as any place in Wales, and when they decide upon a day out in force, a handful of water-bailiffs and an odd policeman or two are quite impotent. A veteran now living in the odour of respectability, whom everybody knows who knows the Upper Wye, was once the terror of the bailiffs. In days when convictions were easier and punishments much heavier, he found it incumbent on him, in the face of a hue and cry after some especially heinous achievement, to take to the woods of a neighbouring county. Here he was ultimately tracked and attacked by a bloodhound, which, being far in advance of its owners, he slew with a knife and left dead, to the entire perplexity of his pursuers, who were vainly hunting for the dog while the fugitive was drinking confusion to all authority in a distant tavern with some sympathetic miners.

But these are, of course, trifles compared to the turbulent scenes which Rhayader witnessed in the brave days of old and the supernatural occurrences which well became so romantic and lawless a land. From the platform of the present station you can

look down upon the high mound and earthworks where the castle once stood, and above it the old tower of the church, marking respectively the site of the warring passions, and the pious superstitions that filled the life in medieval times of this ancient district of Gwyrthreynion. The very name should thrill any one with a glimmer of historical sense when it is explained as the equivalent of Vortigern, who, tradition affirms, tarried here for a season between his expulsion from England by the Saxons and his death upon the wild northern coast of Lleyn.

But it is from much later days that the racy qualities of this cockpit of strife and stronghold of superstition come down to us. As an ever-delightful gossip on those heady years in which he lived, Gerald the Welshman may be quoted in brief and pithy words. "Conspicuous," he writes, "was this country (the Upper Wye) for the great and enormous excesses which from ambitious usurpations of territory had arisen among brothers and relations." Between the hammer and the anvil of the Marcher barons and the Welsh princes this debatable land saw perilous times in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Space fails us for any account of the conflicts

which waged around this green castle mound, or of the miracles by which from time to time the saints of old, still psychically active in their rugged little shrines, staggered into brief sobriety these turbulent sons of war. Rhayader was once the county capital, and even now, though it has lost the language, it retains the spirit it expressed, and is the headquarters of Welsh Radnorshire as distinguished from the semi-anglicised eastern portions of this beautiful little county. And this distinction means a good deal. But the Wye, reinforced in the meantime by the Tylerch, and in a short space to be joined by the lustier volume of the Elan, calls us back to its banks.

CHAPTER II

RHAYADER TO HAY

Ye jagged peaks that frown sublime,
Mocking the blunted scythe of Time,
Whence I would watch its lustre pale
Steal from the moon o'er yonder vale!
Thou rock whose bosom black and vast
Bared to the stream's unceasing flow,
Ever its giant shade doth cast
On the tumultuous surge below!
Woods to whose depths retires to die
The wounded echo's melody!
And whither this lone spirit bent
The footsteps of a wild intent.

SHELLEY, *Lines written at Cwm Elan.*

THE run of twelve or thirteen miles due south which the Wye makes from Rhayader to Builth will always come back to any one familiar with the river as one of the many subdivisions into which it seems naturally to fall. It has but just started, however, on its impetuous career when the Elan from the west comes playing brightly in over a wide foreground of green meadow behind which

NOTE.—I should like to acknowledge my obligations in this chapter to the Rev. D. Edmondes-Owen of Llanelwedd, whose frequent companionship and illuminating knowledge of the lore of the district has been extremely helpful.

the bold and broken masses of the Cwm Toyddwr hills form an imposing rampart. And the Elan cannot be passed over, for the transformation that the once secluded vale of Nantgwyllt and its lateral glens have undergone in the last decade is by far the most outstanding feature in the whole of this country. For it is here that the Corporation of Birmingham have come for their water-supply, built a monster dam 120 feet high across the neck of a mountain valley, submerged a hamlet and two country-houses, and lifted the waters of the Elan and the Claerwen into seven miles of winding lake thrust deep into the hills. These gigantic works naturally affected Rhayader and its quiet neighbourhood not a little while in progress. But the clamour and the men have all gone, and the deep waters now sleep amid the eternal hills as if they were part of nature's original scheme, and as if no crops had ever been cut nor men and women lived and died in their dark depths. Disciples of Shelley will not need reminding that in the two country-houses of Nantgwyllt and Cwm Elan, now submerged with the low grounds attached to them, the poet spent a portion of two successive years. The first in dejection after his expulsion from Oxford; the second on his honeymoon with his

young wife, and in the high spirits natural to the occasion, before the disillusioning process, inevitable in this particular case, had set in.

The scene to-day is of a truth sufficiently striking. Wild hills of from fifteen hundred to two thousand feet—those "jagged peaks" invoked by the poet himself—springing abruptly out of these noble sheets of water, could be nothing else. But one is glad to remember how delightfully this winsome valley before the deluge thrust its two slight and gracious arms of meadow, wood, and glittering stream into the overhanging solitudes that now cast their shadows upon such a world of waters. It is not surprising that curious strangers now come in quite appreciable numbers to gaze upon a scene so uncommon and imposing. Indeed, I feel that I ought to qualify my former statement as to this Silurian mountain wilderness being quite unknown, from the fact that these long, new-formed lakes are thrust well into their sides, and that Drygan, a lonely mass among them of some local repute, and considerably over two thousand feet, is not an hour's walk from the upper end of one of them. But I do not think the strangers that come here are often tempted to such enterprises. They are mainly of the motoring

class, or of the humbler sybarite who affects the more gregarious char-à-banc. They come to gaze, perhaps to eat, and then to ride away. Though anglers, to be sure, find their way here, for the waters are well stocked with trout, I much doubt if the "mountains of Elynedd" see anything of them.

Shelley came here because his cousins the Groves, otherwise of Wiltshire, owned the estate and the two vanished mansions, one of which they lent or let him on his second visit. And on account of the Groves another and lesser English poet, but of no little fame in his day, was stopping here before Shelley, namely, the scholarly Wiltshire parson, Thomas Lisle — otherwise "Tommy" — Bowles, a neighbour and friend of another "Tommy," Moore, who was fond of cracking jokes at his expense. Bowles penned a poem of several pages on Cwm Elan; Shelley wrote some youthful, but fine impassioned lines on his second visit, which were not published till thirty-six years ago, and one or two amusing letters. It was the poet's first intimacy with wild scenery, and unless in this particular he was different from other imaginative people—which is not in the least likely—Cwm Elan must have been graven deep upon his mind for life. And obviously this gives the place an

abiding further interest. Over the high dam at the foot of the lakes—which in a general way one would fain forget and avoid—the water falls 120 feet into the bed of the Elan, and this seems to be what chiefly captivates the merry tourist.

Swollen by the Elan, the Wye now rages downward through a long series of most inspiring sylvan scenes, its waters churned into a thousand moods by the rugged nature of their bed. Above the mantling woods, that in autumn wave such a gorgeous canopy upon the river's now wide and fretting surface, lofty rock-breasted hills, beautifully diversified with the rich colouring of wilder Wales —with grey cliff and emerald sward, russet fern and birchen glade—lift their hoary heads a thousand feet into the sky. Upon the right bank all is now Brecon territory, the ancient province of Brycheiniog. Upon the left, Radnor still keeps her grip upon the Wye, which for full forty miles of unalloyed beauty should be enough distinction, even were there nothing else, for a little county of whose very whereabouts the world is mostly more than vague.

By these secluded rapids of the Wye, too, lived a long distinguished painter, and for a quarter of a century or more the faithful at the Royal

Academy must again and again have admired on its walls these tumbling rapids of amber water, these hanging woodlands, these upstanding hoary hills. The park lands of Doldowlod with their fringing woods squeeze themselves picturesquely along the river bank, while Doleven upon the Radnor shore lifts its crown some 1600 feet into the sky.

At Newbridge and Llysdinam the broken heights on either side have fallen back, but the Wye surges on with a vigour no whit abated by its recent efforts in more contracted channels. Pouring into it just here upon the left bank comes the Ithon, the last but one of its greater Welsh tributaries. Predominant partner as is Radnorshire in these glories of the Upper Wye, the Ithon is its own peculiar and characteristic river. Cradled in the northern wilds of the county along the rugged edges of Montgomery, this buoyant and charming river spends all its days within it. Long-drawn-out days they are too, by its tortuous and erratic progress, which one might fancy were prompted by a determination to tap every little watershed and gather into its bosom every Radnorian brook and stream that might be inclined to stray away or cut out its own career: the Dulas, the Camddwr, and chief the Clwyedog, from the mountain hollow

which enfolds what the vengeance of Glyndwr has left us of the great abbey of Cwm Hîr; while nameless brooks, born in the high western slopes of Radnor forest, bring down their tribute. This basin of the Ithon is less stern and rugged than the land across the Wye. A fine and but half-shackled country nevertheless, ever shaking itself free of encumbering fences in wide commons of gorse and heather, or springing up into wayward ranges of high crisp sheep pasture and fantastic igneous crag, that discover a thousand fresh beauties of distance and foreground to the wanderer who essays their green and ferny tracks. This old district of Melenydd along the east of the Wye, which the Ithon waters, this dark and bloody land of the chronicles, the erst haunt of bandits and outlaws, has still the indefinable charm of seeming in a physical sense even yet but half tamed.

But there should be some few aliens at least who have discovered the secrets of Elvael and Melenydd, since its call to the pedestrian—if there be any left in these days to hear—is loud enough even to the man on the highway. For Llandrindod Wells is perched above the Ithon but five miles from the Wye, and Landrindod is nowadays a place of great resort. Many of us

can remember when its name conveyed scarce any meaning to the Saxon ear, and the Cymric speech of preacher and deacon were by far the dominant note around its healing springs. It is now famous and fashionable, and quite deplorably worldly, while its buildings have grown by leaps and bounds. These last are not aesthetic, to be sure, but their situation looking across to the course of the Wye and the mountains from which we have just emerged is notoriously delightful, and being 700 feet above the sea, the air is equal to the outlook. The saline and chalybeate springs inspire a widespread confidence, though the sulphur water is not, of course, comparable to that of Llanwrtyd, west of the Wye. Without any origin but its waters, first seriously though sparingly used about a century ago, Llandrindod is now virtually the county town. If the heptarchy is restored, it is quite probable that to avoid bloodshed over the matter between North and South Wales it will be made the political capital of the Principality. Its natural and geographical claim to the distinction seems almost too obvious for discussion. Then indeed the cup of the now prosperous but for long unfortunate Llandrindod would be brimming over!

In fine weather the Ithon pours into the Wye a

stream as pellucid as her own, but in flood-time the wash of many a soft red bank and fallow field joins here the greater river's peat-stained waters. When the Wye is fining down after a flood the water is "in order," and the salmon-fisher at work about Newbridge or Doldowlod some hours before the pools at Caer'wnon and Lechryd are free from the Radnor stream's discolouring influence. And talking of Caer'wnon, the view from the main road above that pleasantly planted abode, running at this point along a ridge half a mile from the river, gives another prospect of the latter from any yet noticed. For here the confusion of hills and mountains through which we followed it to Doldowlod are all extended in shapely fashion, upraised in bold barriers beyond the swelling foreground of foliage and pasture, while the trail of the river in its still deep depression through this softer lower country, with here and there the actual gleam of its waters, can be marked in all their ample setting to singular advantage.

At Builth road station, the L. & N.W. railway crosses the Wye, to climb by slow degrees the Yrfon valley up to its wild watershed, and then to run down nearly a thousand feet into the vale of Towy and South-West Wales. Within a stone's

throw of the two little stations where the Cambrian and the main line cross each other is the mysterious prehistoric fortress of Lechryd. Not one in ten thousand of the passengers who await their trains on these busy little platforms has any notion of its existence. Indeed at first sight there is nothing unusual to proclaim it — only a new farm-house standing on what might well seem a natural knoll, but is in fact an immense circular tump covering more than an acre, and raised beyond doubt in prehistoric times. Around it at some distance are wide ditches full of water and fringed by well-grown trees, suggestive doubtless, to the casual eye, of ill-kept channels for draining what is obviously a marshy spot.

These broad ditches with their accompanying bank form, in fact, a perfect parallelogram of great extent. A paved Roman road, moreover, leads out of it to the time-honoured ford of Lechryd on the Wye close by, bound afterwards for the large Roman station of Bavonium, near Brecon, still so perfect. That the stronghold of a Welsh lord of Lechryd stood on the tump in medieval and later days is a matter of ordinary knowledge, and would be of least interest, but for the fact that it figured in the death of Prince Llewelyn, of which anon.

But the place points unmistakably to a former occupation of far greater importance, successively British and Roman, the very natural corollary, moreover, of a much-used ford on an important river.

Just below the old ford of Lechryd begins that turbulent half-mile of rapid known as "Builth Rocks"; where the river, when reasonably full, forces itself with great fury through massive obstructing boulders and projecting ledges of unyielding crag, and hurls itself into heaving pools that have been famous for all time among the salmon-fishers of Wye. Just as the river is sobering down after this prolonged uproar, and the little town of Builth is in easy sight, the peaty streams of the Yrfon, the last of the Wye's important Welsh tributaries, come pouring in from the west. Of all the Wye's affluents the Yrfon is the most beautiful. Born in the heart of the wilderness near the western slopes of Drygarn, it runs for some time an infant race, in a parallel gorge, with the Towy, and reaches the fringe of human ken just above the beautiful mountain hamlet of Abergwessin.

For in a deep trough just above this, draped in bracken, birch, and gnarled oaks, and buttressed with rock, a strange fissure in the river's seething bed known as the *Wolfe's Leap* attracts a few of

the more enterprising visitors from the Spas. But it is the glory of the valley more than the traditional pathway of long vanished wolves which draws the occasional pilgrim from the outer world. High up the Yrfon too, and most felicitously situated upon its banks, is the famous sulphur spring of Llanwrtyd, only equalled in this island by that of Harrogate. I have seen men come here myself hobbling on two sticks, who in a week or two were breasting the mountain slopes with an umbrella! What is more to the point in dealing with the scenery of the Upper Wye, the Dolecoed Hotel, to which the Pumphouse is attached, is the only place of comfortable abode which gives immediate access to the South Wales Highlands, just as the smaller Black Lion at Llangurig would serve that purpose on their north-eastern corner. From its mouth to its source the Yrfon is an impetuous mountain stream, tinged with the amber of remote peat mosses in summer days, and in autumn floods pouring dark volumes of mountain water into the Wye's broadening bosom. Whether in the solitudes of its earlier days or in the deep green gorges filled with pastoral life and shadowed by beetling crags and moors between Abergwessin and Llanwrytyd, or again when it strikes the steep foot of the Eppynt

and runs down beneath those higher and glorious ramparts, bracken-clad and heather-crowned, to where the last Llewelyn fell upon its banks, every mile of it is beautiful.

Builth contains about 2000 souls, and as it possesses saline springs of merit and potency, it absorbs several hundred more in the summer months. It is also a stock market of ancient fame, where Welsh-speaking hill-farmers from the west of the Wye mingle with the Radnor men from the east, and when one of its fairs is in progress the narrow streets are choked with frenzied animals and demonstrative dogs, while sticks whack a lively accompaniment to much strenuous exhortation in both Saxon and Cymraeg. The little town is of a truth most felicitously seated, for a fresh range of hills, the Eppynt, have now come thrusting up from the west, at an average elevation of some fifteen hundred feet, to overhang the Wye, and Builth lies snugly upon their umbrageous skirts. A broad green, too, spreads between town and river, now swollen by its confluent streams to nearly a hundred yards in width. Looking down it from here, a stone bridge of six high arches receives the swift but now noiseless current, and with the green shoulders of Eppynt rising high to heaven behind it,

makes a striking picture. The parish church with its grey Norman tower and high sheltering trees stands out in suggestive contrast to the modern buildings, on the north side of the town, representing in itself the Builth of old, when a church, a fortress, and a place for a market was all that mattered in these small Welsh towns, though they mattered, to be sure, a good deal. At the south end, lifted up in full view, the mound on which the fortress stood, with its grass-grown rampart and defences, tells its own tale more conspicuously than do most of such dismantled sites.

Beyond the usual turbulent memories that cling to Border towns, Builth is, of course, classic ground in Welsh history. For here in 1282 the finishing blow was given to the last glimmer of Welsh independence, and on the banks of the Yrfon, a mile or two from its mouth, perished in a petty skirmish Llewelyn ap Griffith, the last prince of Wales. The closing scene, and that too in brief, must suffice here. But Llewelyn, the Saxon reader may need reminding, was not merely the last, but one of the bravest and most distinguished of the Welsh chieftains that for two centuries had striven against the mighty Norman power. Nor is the romance of love lacking to the tragedy of

Llewelyn's life and fate. His early and later wars with Edward the First and his father had resulted in his final reduction to the Lordship of the four cantrefs of Snowdon and a life interest in Anglesey. His grandfather, Llewelyn the Great, had headed all Wales, and even held the balance of power at one period of the Barons' wars with Henry the Third, and the last Llewelyn had aspired to something of such leadership.

But Edward, the matured warrior and king, was too much for Llewelyn, as he was for most people. Moreover, the North Welsh Prince while staying at Kenilworth Castle had fallen in love with the fair daughter of Simon de Montfort, and his devotion withstood both time and absence. While Edward and Llewelyn were at odds, the young woman, on her way from France to marry the Prince, was caught on the high seas by his enemies, and held by the king as a trump card against his rebellious vassal. It was played with success, and peace was made, after which there was a grand wedding in Worcester Cathedral in the presence of Edward and his Court. Llewelyn was then left to his shrunken honours, as already told, and to his bride, who died in child-birth of a daughter; and in due course her sorrowing husband, whether for his

honour's sake or at his headier nobles' instigation, rose again. There was a successful battle on the Menai Strait, and Llewelyn, with a view to sounding the chiefs of South Wales, came down here to a little castle, a mere hunting-box, that he owned at the mouth of the Edw, four miles below Builth, the remains of which are still standing. Giffard, the Anglo-Norman constable of Builth Castle, was a connection and old friend of the Prince. It is thought that he tempted Llewelyn hither and to his fate by a promise of joining him, and then informed the Mortimers, the Marcher Lords of all this country, that the bird could be captured. Two Mortimers and Roger l'Estrange, acting on this information, surprised Llewelyn, who had only brought with him from North Wales a little company of eighteen men, at Aberedw; but the Prince escaped in time, and hastened to Builth and the supposed friendly shelter of the castle. This was of course refused, so Llewelyn, reinforced by some friendly townsfolk, broke down the bridge against the Mortimers, and then hastened across the angle of the Wye and Yrfon to Pont-y-coed, a wooden bridge over the latter stream, near Llanynis church. Mortimer and l'Estrange, however, being notified by Giffard of

the cutting of Builth bridge, then a wooden one, had crossed the Wye down below at Erwood with a far superior force, and with unexpected speed were now approaching up its western bank. Thinking he was well ahead, and leaving his men to guard the bridge over the Yrfon, it is thought that the exhausted Prince retired to a barn at Cefn-y-bedd to snatch some brief and much-needed rest. But the English, pressing on and failing to force the bridge, sent a band of horsemen unbeknown up the woody bank of the river to a ford above, who, descending upon the farther side, cut Llewelyn's little band of North Welshmen to pieces before the Prince could be warned. When the news of battle reached him, however, Llewelyn made for the scene at all speed, possibly unequipped, for the first of L'Estrange's victorious soldiers (Adam Franckton) to meet him struck him down mortally wounded and passed on unconscious in the heat of the moment of his victim's identity. Returning later, however, he recognized Llewelyn and hacked off his head, which, as every one knows, was sent to Edward I. at Rhuddlan Castle and then forwarded to London, where, crowned with ivy, it was carried on the point of a spear in triumph up Cheapside. The body of this last Prince of Gwynedd was laid

in the Abbey of Cwm-hir in Radnorshire beside the dust of many bygone chieftains of Powys. A small obelisk near the road to Cilmery, standing just above the place where he fell, is the only memorial in all Wales to the last, the most unfortunate, and not the least distinguished of her native princes, "the dark eagle of the North," the "chief of the golden-bordered shield."

The ridge above the Yrfon has borne for all time the name of Cefn-y-bedd (*the ridge of the grave*). Local tradition has naturally seized upon such a felicitous coincidence and associated it with the grave as well as the death of Llewelyn, which was for long a rather confused tale. Recent investigation of much documentary evidence, while it has proved the place-name to be older than the Prince and shattered a much-treasured association, has at the same time unravelled the incidents of these two memorable days, which, less a few trifling accessories and shorn, for lack of space, not appreciation, of some time-honoured legends, are such as are here set down. L'Estrange and his companions were copiously rewarded with grants of land, upon one of which, at Hunstanton in Norfolk, most East Anglians, I take it, are aware that his descendants are still seated. Tradition, we all know, is capable

of deplorable perversion of the truth. The Norman Giffard with his garrison in Builth Castle, having been doubtless guilty of treachery to Llewelyn in the ordinary personal sense, common enough at that day, went down to fame as *Bradwyr Baullt*, the "traitors of Builth." This got shifted after the disappearance of the castle to the innocent citizens of the little town, who to the best of their power assisted their compatriot and lived in constant fear of the rapacious crew in the fortress that dominated them. Long years agone, the first time I ever set eyes on Builth, from a distant Radnor hill-top, my companion, a patriotic Welshman, with a strong sense and reasonable knowledge of the past, quite blasted the little town in my eyes by the relation of this preposterous but deep-rooted stigma, which he firmly believed against it.

But Builth must have shaken off any such lingering stain by its recent achievements in the cause of Cambrian history. For, with little outside help, the district produced a thousand performers to engage in a costume pageant of the days of old, and actually seated seven times that number of spectators from all over the country. If the historian had not cleared its character, the foul aspersion that its people betrayed Llewelyn is

now at any rate torn to shreds. And one may say with truth that no celebration of the kind has yet been placed upon so fair a stage as these green meadows of the Wye, and in presence of such imposing witnesses as these great silent hills. Builth Castle, whose denuded ramparts now command such a noble vista far up the wide shimmering river and such a far-stretching panorama of distant mountains, had at the death of Llewelyn been recently built by Edward in his most approved concentric and impregnable fashion. Hitherto it had been a Marcher castle, the outpost stronghold of de Braoses and Mortimers, varied by occasional capture and occupation by Welsh leaders.[1] The Edwardian Castle was in good repair so late as the sixteenth century, as Leland testifies, and was then the property of the Crown. Soon afterwards it went the way of most such places, and provided building materials for neighbouring mansions, barns, walls, and pig-sties.

Many persons of note have been associated with Builth — the Wesleys very much so, for Charles married a lady of the Gwynne family of Llanelwedd and Garth, the chief landowners at

[1] The best authorities hold that though the March was the Mortimers', Builth Castle actually belonged to the King and was held for him by the Marcher Lord of the time.

that time of the neighbourhood. It was here he wrote the famous hymn, "Jesu, lover of my soul." That eccentric spinster, Lady Hester Stanhope, who, as the younger Pitt's niece had presided over his London house and been a social leader of consequence, sought refuge in Builth from the disgust which she suddenly conceived for the vanities of the world. Settling herself in its chief hostelry, she played the lady bountiful, and amateur physician, with much diligence, only asking in return that her protégés should swallow her nostrums without demur. Later on she resided for two years at Glanyrfon Farm, and her irrepressible energies in many original directions must have made Builth seem quite dull when the strenuous lady sought those wider fields of the Orient, where she made some stir. Across the river, Llanelwedd Hall, the ancient but renovated mansion of the Gwynnes, stands picturesque and conspicuous. Sir Rowland of that name was prominent in diplomatic and parliamentary life from the reign of Charles the Second to that of Anne, to the great detriment of his pocket, dying within the liberties of the Fleet in 1724. On the ridge of the hill above is Welfield, another country-house, and just out of sight behind it Pencerrig, both

seats of two branches of the Thomas family, large landowners and benefactors of the Welsh Church throughout this country. Pencerrig is of some particular interest, as the keelson of the ill-fated *Royal George* was cut from the oaks for which it was celebrated, and, furthermore, Thomas Jones, a pupil of Wilson's, and the most prominent Welsh artist of his own or any day, inherited the property and died here in 1804. The old church of Llanelwedd, too, standing on the high river-bank, makes a charming picture from Builth bridge, while, rising several hundred feet above it, the igneous hills of Carneddau, crowned with delightful glades of fern and indigenous oaks, have an especial interest; for on their face and summit are not merely the round barrows and the round huts of the Goidel, but, what is much rarer, several long barrows of the earlier Iberian.

But standing on Builth bridge, beneath which the Wye once more falls into agitation, the nature of this further mountain barrier, through which it has to break its way, is finely displayed. For within a mile or two the open vale, with the wide fretting waters so conspicuous in its midst, is virtually closed by the huge barriers of the Eppynt on the one side and Aberedw Hill on

the other. The Eppynts have come forging up through the heart of Breconshire from the Carmarthen mountains, a hundred and fifty square miles of wild sheep walk and grouse moor thrust up some fifteen hundred feet between the Vale of Yrfon and the Vale of Usk. Dipping suddenly to the Wye, and then confronted by the equally high and much more rugged steeps of Aberedw and Landeilo, that are the western barrier of the Radnor moors, they form between them a deep and glorious trough, through which the river leaps rejoicing in normal times among boulders and craggy ledges, and in those of flood rages with tremendous fury. I had the good fortune to stand upon the banks here quite recently when the biggest flood of the past twenty years was raging down between the woods, then bright in their autumn panoply, that fringe this eight or ten miles of contracted channel. Nowhere else, I think, in England or Wales does quite such a wide volume of water run for so far over a rugged bed. The spectacle was almost worth enduring the week of rain that produced it; above all, as the sun was at last shining over this prodigious orgy of the gathered waters of Central Wales. The bridge at Builth, too, after nightfall on such occasions is a sight not easily

forgotten, as the waters rushing high through its six arches meet the lateral ledges below in a waste of seething fury, over which the lights from adjoining houses play with weird, fantastic gleam.

Both the highway and the railroad to Brecon and Hay follow the river upon opposite banks through this winding gorge, by Aberedw to Erwood and Llyswen; both of them, however, so frequently obscured by screening woods as to be hardly noticeable from the river's edge. The road which follows it closely for the whole distance keeps the traveller in more continuous intimacy with the surging waters upon his left hand than does this same road in its earlier stage from Rhayader to Builth. The oak, the ash, and sycamore trees that for long periods overhang the river-side highway are of noble stature, and spread aloft luxuriant canopies of leaves. The ferny glades and hazel copses, the hanging patches of meadow and orchard, and larch grove which clamber up the steep face of the Eppynt to the russet heights, far above where the curlews breed, are the common haunt of many migrant song-birds, that are in most districts accounted rare. But the chief feature of this reach of the Wye are

the ascending tiers of rocky buttresses that, with shelving intervals of fern and turf, climb like a giant's stairway the thousand feet of frontage which the Aberedw hills thrust upon the river. These singular escarpments of Silurian rock with the volcanic ridges to the north of them, and the deep gorge cut by the river, are things of note among geologists, and Murchison, whose name is scientifically inseparable from these South Wales mountains, spent a long time near this very spot. Just beneath Aberedw Hill the little river Edw makes a worthy entry, flashing in a deep-channelled bed beneath crag and foliage. At its mouth the scant remains of Llewelyn's castle, still further reduced by a cutting of the Cambrian railroad, stand above the confluence, while in a neighbouring bank the cave is still shown where the Prince is supposed to have secreted himself when surprised by L'Estrange and the Mortimers. There is an ancient and interesting little church at Aberedw, and upon the farther or western bank of the Wye, two miles higher up, before the gorge is actually entered, the little stream of the Dihonw comes down from the northern slopes of the Eppynt. At its mouth stood in ancient days a grange of the abbey of Ystradfflur, and it was one

of its monks that followed Llewelyn and shrived him, it is said, in his dying moments, though, like James IV. at Flodden and for the same reason, he died excommunicate. The Dihonw has had its sensational moments, for fifty years ago a cloud-burst occurred in the hills, and a brook you might leap over dry-shod in summer came down in a sudden flood that swept away houses and men and stock. It is a curious thing, too, that this gorge of the Wye, this long cleft, between the Radnor and the Eppynt hills, has been for a century, with slight recent modifications, the line between the languages; since English, for at least that period, has been the sole speech of the Radnorian country folk, while at this very day the farmers on the Eppynt and along its fringes cling to the ancient tongue, though, unlike some other parts of Wales, one might fear its days here are numbered.

An English lawyer travelling in this very district has given us an illuminating glimpse of these Welsh villages by the Wye in the year 1744. The parish *feasts* in those days were really notable events and greatly cherished by all classes. The said traveller was himself present at both Aberedw and the neighbouring village of Disserth during the celebration of these important functions. He

describes the throngs of country people in their neat gala dresses, with the women and girls of course in their pointed beaver hats and frilled white caps; the booths set out with simple delicacies; and, above all, the energetic dancing for which the Welsh were then distinguished. In a barn near by, ten couples of well-dressed gentlefolk of the squirearchy call forth our traveller's admiration for the skill and agility they displayed. In the churchyard two or three more sets of the peasantry were executing country dances to the music of fiddlers scraping away upon adjoining tombstones. Against the wall of the church, boys and young men were playing fives, a pastime that like dancing was customary all over Wales. Particular airs or songs, too, were associated with local notabilities and known as "Bumpers"; one such as "Bumper Squire Jones," in a contemporary MS. of this date, was shown me recently. Peacock very possibly had this in his mind when he drew the inimitable scene of the Christmas gathering at Headlong Hall, where the Squire accompanied by his numerous and uproarious relations, in the small hours observes the time-honoured annual rite and roars in frisking chorus the clan song of "Headlong ap Headlong," etc.

Many fearsome things have taken place in the neighbourhood of Builth, not only in the bloody days of old, but almost within memory. The little church of Llanavan, on a slope near the west bank of Wye, above the confluence of the Yrfon, is still to be seen, where in the days of Henry I., according to Giraldus, a dire event occurred. For it so happened that the then Lord of Radnor Castle, while on a hunting expedition, found himself far from home, and had the temerity to spend the night there with his hounds. In the morning it was found that the hounds were all mad and their master blind. Wearying of a sightless life, the latter had himself conveyed to Jerusalem, and there, fully accoutred, was set on horseback and led into battle against the infidels, at whose hands it may be imagined he speedily "closed his life with honour." In Giraldus' own day, again, an attendant of Eineon, son-in-law of Prince Rhys, while hunting with his master in this same district, shot a hind bearing horns of twelve years' growth, which would have been sent as a present to Henry the Second had not the supernatural nature of the beast manifested itself upon the right eye of the archer, which immediately lost its sight, while his body was seized with paralysis. On the night, too,

which witnessed the death of Henry I., two tarns in the Radnor moors behind Aberedw burst their bounds. The one emptied itself down gorges into the Wye, the other found a fresh situation two miles below, where it complacently settled itself, fish and all, and may be seen at this day.

But it is not necessary to travel so far back as this for supernatural doings, for in the last years of the eighteenth century a substantial tanner of Henllan, of usurious and unpopular record upon earth, was laid to what proved an uneasy rest in the churchyard of Disserth. But the malignant yeoman refused to lie in peace, and took to jumping up behind farmers as they rode away from Builth after dusk and causing them to gallop for their very lives, the devil, they might in truth declare, being actually behind them. The fear of this supernatural practical joker at length grew so unbearable, it was felt that there would be no peace till the nimble ghost was laid. Its achievements, of course, we can only take on trust, but of the exorcising which extinguished them there is no doubt whatever, since a quite serious contemporary account of the performance from a local journal is extant.

Now the Rev. J. Jones, Vicar of Disserth and

Cefullys, seems to have been endowed with an especial skill in ghost-laying as well as being, in other respects, a cleric of light and leading, and he was selected on this occasion for the important job in hand. The country people crowded to Disserth church, and arranging themselves around it at the respectful distance their natural fears suggested, awaited the uncanny performance. Parson Jones, heading a short procession of the neighbouring clergy, then entered the church, while the populace without awaited in awe-struck silence the result. No sign came for a long time, till one by one the assisting clergy came out of the church and joined the crowd, admitting that their efforts had been so far fruitless. Mr. Jones, however, continued to wrestle by himself with the stubborn spirit of the tanner of Henllan. The process of exorcism or the methods of proof are not recounted, but, at any rate, the vicar at length emerged from the church with the news that he had succeeded in driving the malicious spirit into a bluebottle fly, which he produced. The relief of the audience seems to have been heartfelt and genuine; the bluebottle was carefully enclosed in an empty snuff-box, and lest the tanner should get up to his fearsome tricks again, the

snuff-box attached to the point of a stick was thrust as deep into Coedeiddig bog near Caer'wnon as the vicar could drive it.[1]

To see the Welsh Wye properly you must walk and climb, as well as follow the valley, which, if done in leisurely fashion, will be richly rewarded. It is idle to fancy that a spin along the road at twenty miles an hour will give you anything of its spirit or leave any worthy impressions. If time is so precious or the object held as so inconsiderable, I should be almost inclined to recommend the alternative of the Cambrian railroad, as upon the whole its track is upon more consistently intimate terms with the river than even the road. But when you have climbed the bordering hills the temptation to range away into the heart of the uplands, so eloquently suggestive as are these of wellnigh illimitable rambles, will be great upon you. But it will be enough to say here, that the view down the Wye from the summit or southern flanks of Aberedw Hill is among the finest on the river. For at the far-away end of the deep trough through which it hurls its broad foaming waters the fine masses of the Black Mountains, which

[1] The belief was that being laid in wet marshy soil the spirit was effectually laid, but if buried in dry ground would be freed again in a hundred years.

later on force the river to the eastward and to England, loom large against the sky, a noble background of shapely outline.

At Erwood (*y rhyd*, "the ford"), where Llewelyn's captors crossed the river in pursuit of him, there is a modern toll bridge with a comfortable inn just beside it on the Radnor bank, where good bed and board may be had. Perched high on the Brecon shore the little hamlet itself boasts the somewhat incongruous honour of being the spot where the idea of *Punch* was conceived by its founders. For while seeking seclusion from importunate creditors, Henry Mayhew resided in the Erwood inn which is still standing, and spent much of his time in the village, where he delighted the country folk who gathered there with his genial ways and abounding stories of lands and scenes strange enough to them. One or two of his friends sought him out in his seclusion, and between them in the remote village was laid, it is said, the scheme that fructified beyond the measure of their wildest dreams.

All down here are famous and valuable stretches of salmon water. One piece that now fetches between two and three hundred pounds a year was rented half a century ago by a sporting black-

smith for ten. The trouting, which at the same period and for some time later was very fine, has practically ceased to exist, not so much on account of the pike which have for long come up from the lower reaches, but for the swarms of chub which within a generation have seriously usurped the former feeding and spawning grounds of the nobler fish nearly up to Rhayader.

Below Erwood the stately woods of Llangoed Castle fill the narrow strip between hill and river; and at Boughrood (*Bwych-rhyd*) a stone bridge crosses the Wye. With the village and ancient church of Llyswen the river finally escapes from its beautiful and tumultuous captivity. Above Boughrood, too, on the Radnor shore, comes in the little Bachwye, a short distance up which a beautiful cataract plunges into a deep gorge of sinister renown. On its summit, the Craig-pwll-dhu (*rock of the black pool*), once dwelt a cruel chieftain whose favourite pastime was to ruin young girls and then fling them into the abyss below, where the stain of their blood upon a rock is still visible to the faithful. Up this valley, too, is that mysterious lake, Llyn-Bwchllyn, already mentioned upon the authority of Giraldus as having shifted its situation two miles in a single

night. Both the geological strata and the flora of this ravine of the Bachwye have attracted thither men of light and leading in such matters. The shyer birds, too, from the raven downwards, have always made it more or less of a breeding-ground, for, as already related, these glorious wilds about the Upper Wye, these ancient districts of Brycheinioc and Gwrthreynion, of Arwystli, Elvael and Melenydd are still the last refuge of the hunted of the air. Rich in every form of bird and animal life, the wilderness west of the Wye has been spared the undeniably numbing and even blighting influence of the modern grouse moor when it is a serious or commercial asset. But above all there are enthusiastic ornithologists and also sportsmen of the right kind in this country. Every breeding pair of ravens, kites, or buzzards from Plinlimmon to the Eppynt, from the wild gorges of the Upper Towy to Radnor forest, speaking broadly, is known and in a manner guarded. And this not from fear of spontaneous local molestation, for the reader probably does not know that there are persons in London and elsewhere who devote themselves to an unremitting quest after such rare eggs for practically commercial purposes, in which the suborning of farmers

or keepers is a natural corollary, and the automobile has added another terror to this danger.

With the parish of Glasbury the landscape in a measure changes. The valley expands in fields, woods, and homesteads of a more low-country type, which cover the gentle undulating surface of the ever-widening space between the hills. For the Radnor moors now swerving to the east with the river still form one back-lying wall of the valley, while the Black Mountains springing to a height of over 2000 feet form a nobler rampart upon the other. As the temper of the river here changes and its currents glide from long still deeps to swishing stony-bottomed rapids, a character to be maintained henceforward through all its changing scenes, so also the surroundings assume the smoother, more spacious qualities of an English western county, wholly glorified by the superb wall of mountains that dominates all. As the Wye glides and ripples with sinuous course through the broad meadows of the last parishes in Wales, it leaves on its left the gabled Tudor mansion of the Dderw, the original home of the Morgans, now Viscounts Tredegar, and on its right the famous old coaching and angling hostelry of the Three Cocks, with the wooded seats of

Tregoed and Gwernyfed. The Llyfni, too, flowing down from Llangorse Lake in South Breconshire, falls in here. And looking back through the gap by which it comes there is a fine glimpse of the sharp peaks of the *Bannau Brycheinioc* or the Brecon Beacons, lifted nearly three thousand feet into the sky. The beautiful village of Glasbury nestles among a wealth of fine timber upon the flat meadows by the banks of the river, which in broad shimmering shallows now hurries on beneath its quaint bridge towards Hay and the English border, while the imposing pile of Maesllwch Castle looks down upon the scene from the woody foothills of the Radnor moors.

NEAR ERWOOD

CHAPTER III

FROM HAY TO ROSS

We have now entered the second of the Wye's three distinct stages. The fury of its lusty and precocious youth is over. Fifty miles of comparatively sedate middle age lies ahead before it enters the glories of its closing days. And yet the first ten miles of this second period might almost venture to challenge comparison with the best of its youth or age. Where the ancient Border town of Hay nestles at the foot of the Black Mountains, and the broad stream expands in bright rushing shallows under its bridge to glimmer away between pendent foliage, it would be a river indeed that could call this its second best. Up over an ascending stairway of folding foot-hills, gracious in woodland mead and red fallow, the great rampart of the Black Mountain for many miles to the east and to the west displays its ample breasts, its

shadowy ravines, its rock-terraced heathery summits. Hay Bluff, Lord Hereford's Knob, the Gadyr lift their blunted crests above the long procession, the last named surpassing the height of old Plinlimmon by some two hundred feet. Here again is another wild and inspiring block of South Welsh highland severing the vales of Wye and Usk by a broad belt of virgin grouse moor and sheep walk.

Hay, or Le Haie as the Normans called it, sits upon the southern bank of the Wye, the last spot of Breconshire and of Wales. In the old fighting days it was a kind of small Berwick-upon-Tweed, the clashing interests of the two races making it an altogether lively place. It is well, therefore, that something of its castle should be left conspicuously to pose as a monument of its stormy past. Hay was included in that Lordship of Brecon conquered from the Welsh in the time of Rufus by Bernard de Newmarch. But the stones of this particular castle at any rate were not laid till the days of Henry II., and then by that traditional ogre, that man of blood and treachery in Border lore, William de Braose, proprietor of wide lands in Brecon, Gwent, and Gower. His misdeeds do not concern us, as they were not perpetrated in Hay, for Abergavenny upon Usk was his chief lair. But as

an example to those not conversant with Welsh history,—in other words nearly everybody—it may be remarked that he gave a banquet to the Welsh chieftains of his neighbourhood, and having requested them in a friendly way to leave their arms in the ante-room, had them all murdered at his table in cold blood. Giraldus, who was his archdeacon—if an archdeacon could be of any conceivable consequence to such a monster—admitting indirectly the enormity of his performances, attempts a little mild white-washing which makes him if anything worse, for he prefaced every remark, we are told, with an invocation to the Deity, and with every order he issued commanded it to be done "in the name of the Lord." He paid his secretary extra money to embroider his correspondence with pious interpolations, and even in the middle of a conversation, if he caught sight of a cross, began instantly to pray. Altogether the sanguinary William must have been as unblushing a hypocrite as his century produced. It seems to have been more immediately his wife, Maud de Valerie, that built Hay Castle, an honest and strong-minded lady who made a great impression upon the Welsh of her day, and they called her Moll Walbee. Her frame, if they are to be believed, must have

been as stout as her character, for she built the castle in a single night, carrying the stones in her apron. She ruined her truculent hypocrite of a husband, however, by her very honesty, for she told King John what she thought of him in the matter of Prince Arthur's murder in such unmistakably plain language that the pair became a mark for the king's vengeance. De Broase escaped abroad, but the lady and her son were caught, immured in Corfe Castle, and there slowly starved to death. Hay was ultimately restored to a surviving son, who married a daughter of Llewelyn II. or "The Great." After that the castle suffered the usual vicissitudes of the Anglo-Welsh wars, and was ultimately dismantled by Glyndwr. Upon its site, some generations later, the Tudor house which, together with the original embattled gateway, represents Hay Castle to-day, was built by the Gwynnes of Trecastle. Leland was here not long before the rebuilding, and tells us that the castle had at some time been a stately one, and that the town still "showed token of a right strong waulle having in hit III gates and a posterne. The paroche church too is neatly fair." Standing picturesquely above the river, beside a prehistoric tower, the unwary pilgrim attracted by so promising

HAY, AND RADNOR FOREST

a prospect will find Hay church to-day neat indeed —a very triumph all save the old tower of the late Georgian, sometimes aptly called the churchwarden style.

Hay is now the centre of a flourishing as well as a beautiful region. Country-houses of romantic setting are perched here and there upon the foot-hills of the Black Mountains or of the Radnor moors, which trail their billowy course in less conspicuous fashion along the northern sky-line. The town has still some queer narrow streets and some squat old stone houses suggestive of its past, while on fair days it becomes, like Builth, a scene of lively animation : crowded by farmers in small traps from valley and mountain, men of broad acres in smart traps, and men of small things on shaggy ponies from both sides of the Border. But the true Border has ceased for generations to march with county limits, and could only be traced with a pen by a local expert. English affinities are dovetailed in Brecon and Radnor with those of Wales. The latter are most stubborn among the hills and mountains, the former are virtually complete in the smoother low country.

But this is a rather subtle matter, not in fact, but in description. There is a belt of English-

speaking Welsh folk eastward of their bilingual compatriots who are as Welsh in outlook and habit as the others. There are other districts, again, that have virtually lost all sense of nationality, are not, in short, interested in the matter, being much more concerned with their neighbours of Salop and Hereford and their markets than with Welsh aspirations. This is inevitable from a long-continued community of interest, speech, and habit. All these Borderers, English and Welsh, speak the same soft, pleasant South Saxon tongue with a Welsh intonation, which reaches to the Severn and only gets more marked and more rapid of utterance as you approach the Upper Wye, or its corresponding but vaguer lines of demarcation to the southward. The countrywomen of this southern borderland, the women of the farm-houses especially, speak the best and pleasantest English for their station (for the holdings are mostly small) of any known to me in Great Britain.

From Hay to Hereford is about twenty miles by road, and for nearly a third of that distance the Wye flows through the ever-expanding vale that forms so notable a gateway into Central Wales. The Radnor hills recede and trend away to the northwards, and altogether pale in significance

before the nearer dignity of the Black Mountains, which, descending by degrees from their naked grandeur and aerial heights, press far eastward into Herefordshire along the Wye's southern bank in richly wooded steeps a thousand feet or more in altitude. To say that many delightful pilgrimages, even by road and infinitely more and better ones by foot, can be made into and about the Black Mountains seems almost superfluous. Their high passes, easily visible from these banks of Wye, will bring the wanderer to the head of half a dozen different valleys, some uncompromisingly stern and wild, some beautiful in the bosky luxuriance of a half-tamed frontier. Of the former the head of Grwyny, which flows to the Usk, is notable. And then come in parallel troughs the vale of the Honddu, where the great Cistercian ruin of Llanthony is so exquisitely set; then the cradling gorge of the Monnow, with its tributary stream, and the lately excavated remnants of the priory of Craswell. Next that of the Escley and the Dulas; and finally, along the last hollowed step of the stairway descending into Herefordshire lies the Golden Valley, a place of ancient civilization, of corn land and meadow and fair abodes, and cherishing within its secluded bounds the noble abbey of Dore, still used as a

parish church, and bearing the name of the prattling trout stream that waters the vale and washes its walls. All these waters but the first named, rising within an hour's walk or thereabouts of the Wye, turn their backs on it here and, uniting in the Monnow, seek the embraces of a parent fifty miles below that they would seem to have rejected in their infancy. In this open country, road and river are not compelled for so often and for so long to bear each other company, and the road traveller must naturally lose touch with the Wye for considerable intervals through almost the entire length of the county of Hereford. This, however, is hardly of the first consequence. It no longer gathers about its banks those constantly changing vistas of exalted beauty, but with many a curve and loop forges serenely on from placid deep to murmuring stony shallows. Here and there, to be sure, it is lashed by some obstructing ledges into a brief recrudescence of its earlier habit and chants the louder chords of former days. But otherwise it only plays a harmonious part in a wide and opulent landscape. Conspicuous from the many lofty isolated hills and wandering ranges, wrapped always in foliage to their summits after the characteristic fashion of Herefordshire, it drags a broad and

sinuous trail through green pastures sprinkled with the red and white cattle of the cider county, and the ruddy fallows of a shire whose geological formation is expressed with unique simplicity by the single word red-sandstone. In its first and its last stages you follow the river step by step, and grudge every brief exclusion from its intimacy. But here it is usually just a part of this pleasant, wide, open land of Hereford, and there is no object in such close pursuit of its banks. From many an uplifted point on the highway, and from many a bridge you can gather of its best. One might discourse at any length of the villages, the old timbered manor-houses, the churches, and such like in which this country is more than commonly blessed, and that lie back from the Wye on either hand. Indeed, I have done so in another place,[1] but such pleasant dallying is not for these briefer pages. Nor in any case do they seem precisely to belong to the river as Rhayader, Builth, or Hay on the one hand, as Ross, Monmouth, or Chepstow on the other belong to it. One must not omit, however, before altogether losing touch with the Black Mountains, to note the ruined towers of Clifford Castle which belong very much to the Wye, as from their high

[1] *The March and Borderland of Wales.*

perch they almost throw their shadow on its streams. And Clifford Castle is worthy of attention and remembrance, for Rosamond the fair, frail, and luckless mistress of the second Henry was nurtured within them. The historically minded will feel, perhaps, an even greater interest in the fact that her brother, the Norman Welsh Marcher, by his marriage with a ward and migration to Westmorland, founded the great House of "Clifford of the North."

Within sight, too, on the northern bank there sits above the river, and right astride the line that divides England and Wales, the delightful old half-timbered hostelry of Rhydspence, while Whitney village, the first in Herefordshire upon that side, and resting near the river bank, has many a pleasant flag-roofed cottage, and the old hall on the flat where Whitneys lived for generations and Dews for a few more in succession to them. Whitney, however, has broken with its past, and the deserted hall in the meadows and a modern mansion on the little hill-top stand significant of the fact.

This is the main road to Hereford, and runs on the north side of the river all the way, with views of it only here and there. But to gather of its best, it would be wise to cross over Whitney bridge on to

the longer south side road to Hereford by Bredwardine; for thence you are carried high on to the slope of hills, and look down from the very portals of this Gate of Wales at the Wye winding out of it and glistening towards the woody heart of Herefordshire. But at Bredwardine, the last spur of the Black Mountains and the outer rampart of the Golden Valley are washed once more by a violent bend of the Wye. On the hill above crouches a huge cromlech known as Arthur's stone, which, together with the beauty of the surrounding heights, creates the demand for a roadside inn of above average capacity and a "visitors' book." The mound of a vanished castle is here too, and an old church, wherein is a most beautiful alabaster effigy of that Vaughan of Bredwardine and Tretower who shared the honour with Davy Gam of falling in defence of Henry V. at Agincourt, and of being the original of Shakespeare's "Fluellen." A mellow, much-buttressed bridge of quaint device crosses the Wye, which, running over brawling shallows into a deep pool beneath a wooded hill, gives a finishing touch to a spot of many attractions, and well worth some hours of a summer day.

Crossing Bredwardine bridge, one is quickly back again in the main road to Hereford, while the Wye

pursues its course through Moccas, the seat of the Cornewalls for more than two centuries, with its Norman church. Of more import than this by far are the classic meads of Monnington, the next soil watered by the Wye's here sober streams. All that matters, however, is an old manor-house, now a farm, adjacent to a small church with an embattled tower. For in the house, a former edition of it that is to say, dwelt the daughter of Owen Glyndwr, the wife of Monnington of Monnington, and here the great Welsh patriot is generally thought to have spent his closing years and died. A tradition, which we all like to cherish, places his grave beneath a rough slab of slate-stone adjoining the church porch. Running from Monnington towards Moccas, too, is a remarkable avenue of huge and ancient fir trees, carpeted with turf, which a further and less credible tradition associates with Glyndwr's headlong rides to Wales, when hunted from his lair as an unyielding fugitive in his latter years.

At Byford, two miles below, a beautiful black and white gabled Tudor house, with a background of luxuriant foliage, and the glimpse of an embattled church tower, makes a picture truly characteristic of the Herefordshire Wye. A stretch or two below, at Bridge Sollars, where Offa's dyke

HEREFORD

arrives from the north on the river bank, to be lost beyond it, is another memorable spot, well worth the trifling detour by a branching road to a bridge which exposes from its centre looking upward a long reach of rapid water glancing beneath a lofty curtain of woodland; while set high on a green knoll above the bridge is a fine old creeper-clad Herefordshire homestead with its ample barns and byres. Not any of the loitering to which these opulent Herefordian meadows compel the Wye affects the vigour and the clarity of its mountain waters. In its frequent interludes of rejoicing over stony beds, you can look down from bridge or bank and read the secrets of its troubled depths below the rapids, as plainly as at Builth or Erwood. It maintains the fine flavour of its mountain birth almost to the end, while here, as yet in middle life, it plays and frolics in swift shallows beneath the willows and alders or branching oaks by the bank edge. Here the samlets sport, and such trout as the hustling chub have left come up to feed, while in the smoother gravelly swims, large grayling hold their own to better purpose. But in long still pools the salmon, resting on his upward journey or waiting for another freshet, sees, and no doubt to his unstinted disgust, the pike and the big perch for

which these reaches are famous, in chief possession. No wonder the cattle in warm weather spend half their time knee deep in such inviting shallows, felicitously grouped against the warm landscape, with its melting background of woody ranges and blue mountains.

Through many such pleasant scenes the Wye pursues its pastoral way. By the rapids that sparkle, and the deeps that steal beneath the woodlands of New Weir; by the picturesque boat-ferry of Sugwas and its gravel-bottomed streams, and beneath the hanging woods and breezy commons of Breinton it forges on to the ancient city of Hereford to the mutual advantage, one may confidently add, of both town and river; for in the first the significance of the Wye in history and tradition seems to find complete expression. Virtually, if not quite literally, Hereford, since time began, has been in peace and war, in church and state the dominant factor in the Wye valley, almost from its source to its mouth. One must reach back, indeed beyond Saxon times, to find anything else. Over the very bridge, beneath which the river flows from the country to lave the leafy precincts of Palace, Cathedral, and Castle green, the tramp of armies sounded incessantly through

the long centuries, when war was the trade of all this Border country. Every king of England, till Henry VIII., was here in arms against the Welsh or the Marcher barons, whose soldiers were mainly Welshmen, or in the later tumult of the wars of the Roses. It was the last-mentioned king who politically united Wales to England, broke up the independent palatinate Lordships which covered most of Central and South Wales, and created the counties of Brecon, Radnor, and Monmouth, with some others not pertinent here, and summoned Welsh members for the first time to Parliament. Hereford, to which at this time was tacked on some Marcher territory, had been a Royal county under an earl or some similar representative of the Crown since Mercian times, and constituted a buffer and defence against the turbulent regions beyond. Though the people of the county had, and still have, a preponderance of Welsh blood, the language being freely spoken in the town itself as late as the Commonwealth, they became identified with English arms and interests even before the Norman conquest. After it, like the men of Shropshire and Cheshire, they remained inured to war by continual conflict with the Welsh ; in short, a race of soldiers by training and habit, when most

of the English common folk were both unwarlike and untrained.

Their hereditary foes, the Welsh of Wales, shared, of course, their martial characteristics; and when those of the Marches had been gradually detached from the flickering gleams of Welsh nationality that smouldered and flashed out in bloody interludes from behind the Eppynt, the Elynedd Mountains, and from North Wales, they marched with the English Borderers to fight the battles of Norman lords and English kings on many distant fields. From the English Border counties then, and from Monmouth, Brecon, Radnor, and Glamorgan, came the men who were inured to war and liked it, including nearly all the trained archers of the kingdom till the time of Edward III. The reader has probably a vague idea that the famous English long-bow was evolved on the village greens of Kent or Hampshire. It came, on the contrary, from the land of Wye and Severn and Usk. These men could shoot arrows through three-inch boards, and, according to Giraldus, pin the thighs of hostile horsemen to their saddles, while the weapon was more useless to an average English yokel than a Martini-Henry would now be in the hands of a plough-boy. But there are

better authorities than Giraldus that most of the effective foot-soldiers of Edward I. and the preceding periods came from this Welsh borderland. Putting all cavalry aside, a division of archers from the banks of Wye could have marched them through a hostile Devon or Suffolk, as trained regulars with a long war service could march over a horde of unsophisticated volunteers, and indeed much more easily, for any one can at least fire off a rifle. The English archer of popular tradition was not yet, though he was soon to arrive. This whole country indeed about Severn and Wye and Usk, now in its serene agricultural composure, so relatively insignificant in the life of a nation long abandoned to shops, factories, and commerce and paid soldiers, was once the storm centre of England. Its great nobles, its Lacys, Clares, and Mortimers, with their impregnable castles, and great stores of effective fighting men, English and Welsh, were the most formidable national factor in the eyes of successive English kings.

With the Norman colony that first came to Hereford, certain laws were introduced, named from the district of Normandy whence they came, *the custom of Breteuil.* It is enough to say they proved so satisfactory to all concerned, that when

towns in various parts of England petitioned for charters, they cited Hereford as their model.

But for these long-ago forgotten things few wanderers by the Wye will probably care a fig, nor yet to hear what years of anxiety the faithful city of Hereford suffered in the wars of Glyndwr, whose devastations were carried to its very ramparts. How familiar, too, this city and these Wye banks must have become with the harassed Henry of Bolingbroke, as at the head of army after army he marched westward against the "damned magician," inevitably after a brief interval to return "bootless home and weather-beaten back." And, again, what a slaughtering was here in the market-place of illustrious captives after the neighbouring battle of Mortimer's Cross. The appeal of such things is to the few, though one may surely say the fortunate few. It will be enough to recall that in the Civil Wars Hereford was staunchly Royalist. Being within the Cockpit that lay between Oxford and Wales it wrought and suffered—among other things an unsuccessful siege by the Scots—as much as almost any place in England but Worcester. From this time forward, however, its story becomes wholly peaceful and domestic. From a place of arms and stirring events, far above the lot of most

English towns or counties, it subsides into that delightful tranquillity without decay, which of all things in these noisy, blatant, crowded times of so-called progress, most becomes so well furnished a storehouse of ancient memories. As an ideal, a Trollopian cathedral town, Hereford is well-nigh perfect. No industrial uproar, within even measurable distance, disturbs its serene repose. Nor do any conflicting interests, martial or manufacturing, infringe on the peaceful ecclesiastical flavour which breathes all through it. Cider and perry-making, which is its sole industry worth noting, is in quite admirable harmony with the atmosphere. The main streets are wide and cheerful, and on market days well thronged with the wholesome, good-looking type of English folk of all classes that you look for in the shire town of a purely agricultural county. There is a fair sprinkling, too, of half-timbered houses, a beautiful Tudor Almshouse, the Conningsby Hospital, and one or two fine old churches, besides, of course, the cathedral, and all that thereby pertains. Though among the smaller group, and less striking in exterior than many, Hereford Cathedral is full of varied work of every century, from the Norman pillars and arches, the Gothic clerestory and

triforium of its nave to the beautiful fan-vaulting of its chapels. The procession of English architecture can be followed here as in few other cathedrals. Hereford can boast the distinction, too, of having been a unit of the ancient Welsh church in the third and fourth centuries, long before St. Augustine arrived for the conversion of Saxon England. The first stone predecessor, however, of the present cathedral was built soon after the death of Offa, King of Mercia. It owes its origin to the murdering of Ethelbert, King of East Anglia, while on a visit to this same Offa, in whose kingdom, Hereford, of course, lay. Offa's queen was the reputed instigator of the treacherous deed, and the miracles performed at the tomb of the murdered monarch in Hereford provided both an inspiring motive, and also the cash for the building enterprise.

The chequered story of the development of the cathedral, its mischances at the hands of the Welsh, from fire and storm or neglect, are interesting, but not in order here. It is enough that with all its troublous past, its treasures of every period preserved, it stands to-day, amid its green carpet of elm-shaded sward, just where it should stand, with the river on one side and the town it dominates

on the other; with its precincts—cloisters, vicars, college, cathedral school, and ancient episcopal palace—spreading down towards the Wye. While upon the site of the ancient castle adjoining them there extends along the river bank an ample stretch of public lawn and garden, whence the burgher of Hereford can behold, as he takes the air, the waters of wild Wales rushing in generous streams at his feet, and away beyond the leafy undulations of his own delectable county, the long stern line of the Black Mountains outlined against the western sky.

Besides grinding the produce of its tributary orchards into cider, Hereford gathers nowadays its share of the tourist traffic. But its great moment is that festival of the Three Choirs, every third year, when people flock hither from the east and from the west, and fill every house to bursting, from floor to garret, and exhaust the provender of the neighbourhood almost as effectually as those medieval armies that gathered here *en route* for Wales. I have said nothing of boating on the Upper Wye, and Hereford, which has a mile or so of still water above it and takes aquatics seriously, reminds me that I should do so. This will not take long; for, though it is quite possible to

have a boat sent up by train to Hay, and come down the river when it is not too low, this is a performance with obvious limitations, and for which a Canadian canoe would be infinitely preferable. From the same boat-yards at Hereford it is equally feasible to row down to Ross, and the trip is often made. But I do not think even the most energetic essay to face the currents of the Wye for any considerable distance. But Hereford is well served, both by road and railroad. It is the centre for scenes of beauty and things of interest innumerable, and the accommodation in so sedate, dignified, and roomy a town will be found adequate by all, but possibly a not uncommon modern type of sybarite, or shall we spell him decadent, that one occasionally encounters.

For some four or five miles below Hereford the Wye pursues an uneventful meadowy course, from shallow rapid to salmon pool, and from salmon pool to tranquil gliding deep. The isolated camp-crowned hill of Dinedor rises high upon its right bank, and at Mordiford that famous little grayling river, the Lugg, after a long course from Leominster and the remoter wilds of Radnor Forest, pours in its copious streams. The old church tower peeps effectively out of the foliage above its banks, and

Sufton Court, the seat of the Herefords, looks down over swelling park lands.

Now the distinguishing characteristic of Herefordshire, away from its mountain fringes, is the number of isolated heights or broken ranges, clad always with luxuriant foliage to their summits and generally touching seven or eight hundred feet in height, that rise with seeming inconsequence, here, there, and everywhere, out of the rich, gently undulating lowland. No other county so consistently displays this enviable singularity; and of all counties known to me its topography is for this reason the most disconcerting to the stranger. Just below Mordiford the Wye runs up to the base of a great block of broken upland, not wild, but woody, pastoral, and of ordinary rural habitation, the crown and centre of which is the Woolhope Valley, famous among geologists as a strange Silurian upcast of fantastic formation, and of an obviously strange geological history among the all-pervading red sandstone of Herefordshire. This chiefly matters here because the Wye, which at Mordiford begins to hug the western foot of these uplands, is pushed out by them for the rest of its way to Ross into some strange gyrations. And as road and river now run near together for some distance, the

far-famed park and mansion of Holm Lacy come within easy sight upon the river's western bank. This is the largest house, and upon the whole the most splendid of the historic seats of Herefordshire. Fashioned of red brick, well mellowed now by time, it is triple fronted, and was built for the most part late in the seventeenth century by the second Lord Scudamore. A century ago it passed by inheritance to the Stanhope family, but in this very year of writing has come to the hammer, and so broken all links with its long, illustrious past. The Scudamores came from the Wily Valley in Wiltshire in the time of Edward III. One branch acquired Kentchurch on the Monnow, where they are still seated, with the blood of Owen Glyndwr, whose daughter married the Squire of that day, in in their veins. The other got Holm Lacy by marriage with the heiress of the great Marcher house of that name. Celebrated by Spenser in the *Faery Queen*, the Scudamores were ennobled in the Stuart period, and became a predominant power, and a power for good in Herefordshire. With its stately rooms, its noble oak timber, its wealth of association, its outlook over the winding Wye, no country-house on the river, from its source to its mouth, could lay claim to quite such distinction.

In a great lawsuit—consequent on the death, in 1820, of the Duchess of Norfolk, a Scudamore by blood and childless owner of Holm Lacy—two wagon-loads of family papers went up to London, and nearly 9000 documents had to be examined. By order of the Lord Chancellor, on the same occasion, all the family tombs were opened that the coffin-plates might be inspected. In the church, whose venerable tower strikes a fine note lower down the valley, generations of Scudamores lie beneath sculptured tombs. And on the hither side of the river the village and church of Fownhope nestle at the foot of the Woolhope range. On the slopes above, a timbered mansion of the sixteenth century has been held ever since that period by a branch of the Lechmeres of the Severn valley in Worcestershire, a truly tenacious race. For the main stock, who date from the Conquest, are there yet, with two seats on the Severn, of which Severn End, mostly destroyed by fire a few years ago, and now rebuilt on the old model, was the best Tudor house on the whole river. The Lechmere memorials in Fownhope church, which has a fine Norman tower with shingle spire, are disappointing. The Silurian rock of this Woolhope upland pushes out beyond Fownhope into the lofty promontory of Capler hill, whose

wooded steeps drop sheer into the Wye, and from whose summit, entrenched with a Roman camp, is a superb view over miles of river. Just at this point Ballingham hill approaches the Wye on the farther shore, after which it shoots away westward, a gleaming streak, for four miles, to wash the oak-shaded park lands of Harewood, anciently, but no longer so, the seat of the Hoskyns, and in its return to complete one of those almost hairpin loops for which the Wye is famous. To get the best of this portion of the river it is assuredly judicious to keep the edge or slope of the high escarpment which overlooks the valley from here to Ross, though this must be done on foot. From Capler, as from other and less elevated points, you can see far over the sinuous trail of the Wye and the broken country of South Herefordshire to that always conspicuous range which carries the eye from Garway hill above the Monnow to the leafy cone of Aconbury on the north. All through this triangle, formed by the Monnow and the Wye with its base, speaking roughly, on the main line, running from Hereford to Pontrilas, the number of Welsh place-names that have survived is notable. But even when the fact is indicated that the triangle in question is the quite remarkable—in an historical

sense—district of Archenfield, I fancy that only a stray Herefordian or a possible Welsh antiquary will scent much significance in the term!

Now when the Mercian Saxons drove the Welsh, or all of them that would not peacefully coalesce and amalgamate, across the line of Offa's dyke, there was a considerable corner here from which the natives were not shifted at all, but remained *en bloc* upon a perfectly good understanding with the intruders, but without any attempt at social or political fusion. They retained their laws, their language, and in a local sense their independence, for the simple reason that they gave their allegiance to the shire of Hereford and the Saxon king so absolutely and unreservedly, that there was never any further question about it. This was not like the Scottish Border, where virtually the same people occupied both sides. In the whole story of the Celt and the Saxon there is nothing quite so curious. So far, too, from being mere time-servers, one of the privileges cherished by this little Cymric state across the Wye was, that when the English musters marched to war against the Welsh the men of Archenfield "form by custom the vanguard in the advance, and the rearguard in the return." There are some significant passages in

Domesday relating to the custom of Archenfield. If one of its Welshmen, for instance, slew the vassal of a Saxon king or of a thegn he paid a money fine. But if he killed another Archenfield Welshman it was ordained that the relations of the slain meet together and plunder the slayer and his kinsman, and burn their houses until about noon on the morrow, when the corpse might be buried, and a third of the spoil handed over to the king. Far greater entertainment was thus provided for all parties than the prosaic handing over of twenty shillings to the Crown, while the latter had the chance of standing in to a much greater amount. The Sheriff of Herefordshire, moreover, used to summon some half-dozen of the leading Archenfield Welshmen to the shire mote, treating them thereby as a separate entity. How long these forty parishes remained a distinct community after the Norman Conquest no one knows, but in effect no doubt for a very long time. Nearly all the names engraved on tombstones on the right bank of the Wye are Welsh. This is not to say, however, that a Jones or a Hughes would fail to resent being dubbed a Welshman with all the righteous indignation of Border custom and tradition; for of the story of Archenfield he knows nothing whatever.

The smooth deeps are longer, the shallows more infrequent in these long loops by which the Wye, coming back to hug its eastern rampart below Perrystone Court, pursues its still sinuous way to Ross, and then only just to brush it with the end of a long tongue, and swerving back once more to pass over upon the other side. If peradventure the traveller has come to Ross from Hereford by way of the high country upon the east bank of the Wye he will understand, before he begins the long downward slope to the town, why its people call it *the Gate of Wye.* For the Wye, as the world in general knows it, begins here. Since leaving the Welsh border, hills have risen fortuitously on or about the river. Again and again its waters have washed, upon one side or the other, the feet of these wooded slopes. But it has scarcely anywhere in Herefordshire run deep in a valley as it ran above Hay, and is again to run below Ross. For, looking down from the heights above, a sea of hills and ridges, the wooded shoulders of the Forest of Dean conspicuous among them, seems to bar the river's further course. Had you come, on the other hand, by the western road, the direct route from Hereford, you would not so well realise the change that is approaching; but with a most picturesque view of

Ross just ahead, climbing the hill to its high steepled church, you would cross the river at Wilton by the massive old sixteenth-century bridge, and be no doubt pulled up short by a curious dial-stone on the wall of the parapet, engraved with the following admonition :—

> Redeem thy precious time,
> Which pass so swift away;
> Prepare thou for Eternity,
> And do not make delay.

One pier was destroyed in the civil war by the Royalists in an attempt to stop Massie, but repaired by the Scots on their retreat from the siege of Hereford. Close to the bridge are the remains of Wilton Castle, an ancient fortress of the time of Stephen, built to guard the ford which did service here before the bridge, and adapted for residence in the time of Elizabeth. Four towers and some Tudor windows remain as a memorial of both periods, and during the latter it belonged to the Lord Grey de Wilton of that time who, being made prisoner by the French, was compelled to sell it to raise the money for his ransom. It is interesting to remember that he was a patron of the poet Spenser, who spent some time here as well as with the Scudamores at Holm Lacy. Wilton was

burned by Sir Barnabas Scudamore during the Civil War, with a view to stimulating the loyalty of its then owner, Sir John Bridges, who was halting between two opinions. It is needless to add that this made a violent Parliament man of Sir John till his dying day.

CHAPTER IV

ROSS TO MONMOUTH

Who hung with woods yon mountain's sultry brow?
From the dry rock who made the waters flow?

Whose causeway parts the Vale with shady rows?
Whose seats the weary traveller repose?
Who taught that heaven-directed spire to rise?
The "Man of Ross," each lisping babe replies.

I ALMOST blush as I transcribe these lines of Pope, and thus surrender absolutely, not to mere convention, that I would never do, but to the steady insistency of the man in possession. And for good or ill, John Kyrle, a benevolent gentleman, who died in Ross, having spent most of his very long life there, in 1724, has slowly absorbed most of its traditions into his own person, and is permanently installed for all ages as its presiding genius. On some former visits to Ross I admit to having chafed no little under the tyranny of its patron Saint, the genial gentleman with the large nose, who lived in the market-place in a house

eminently suggestive of early Georgian country-town hospitality, where he entertained his rural friends on market day with choice wines and choicer converse. I had often thought that if it ever fell to me to print anything concerning Ross I should take an almost malignant pleasure in avoiding all allusion to his irrepressible personality. But it is no good. I dare not do it; and if I dare I do not think I would, for so many landmarks in Herefordshire, avenues and such like, have acquired reputation from the mere fact of having been inspired, if not planted, by the Man of Ross, he takes on almost the character of a magician, which puts him altogether on another footing, and entitles him to high place. The above lines of Pope, carelessly perused, might strengthen that impression. But he was not in fact a second Moses, only in spirit a Progressive Urban District Councillor, born long before his time, and with no terrors to the rate-payer. In short, he was a local philanthropist, though there have been, unquestionably, scores of such who have equally deserved the gratitude of posterity and sought it—which he, good man, did not—without avail. It is not quite certain now whether Pope was poking fun at Ross and its great man, or was inspired with genuine

admiration. The lines are not among his greatest efforts, but they have been priceless to Ross and also to cynical souls in the making merry over its "Man." But that the Man did a great deal for Ross there is no doubt, whatever may be his claims as a local deity upon the stranger, who is neither a rate-payer nor a resident. He did not inspire the most interesting building in the town, the market-hall, which is of Charles the Second's time and looks a good deal older; but he set his seal upon it as upon other things in the shape of a bust of the above-mentioned and impossible king, with an inscribed admonition to his fellow-townsmen to cherish in their hearts a monarch whom probably even the loyal Man of Ross had learned to despise before his inscription had lost its first freshness. Close to the market-hall, too, a chemist's shop displays a tablet indicating the erst domicile of the great man. The house was once an inn, and stopping there on one occasion Coleridge left some further poetic tribute to its former master.

There is little else to hold the attention in Ross till you get up to the church. A quite unremarkable country town in detail, its charm lies in its admirable pose upon the sloping banks of Wye, with the lofty tapering spire of its church spring-

ing heavenward from the top of the ridge, and completing a picture that owes the rest of its distinction to the winding river and the high encircling hills that frame it. Ross church is of generous dimensions, and for the most part of thirteenth-century date. Its east window contains some old glass of the time of Henry the Seventh, while there is a time-honoured curiosity in the shape of some saplings which shot under the church wall nearly a century ago from the trunk of a destroyed elm, and reared themselves up within the building. Here they have regularly put on and off their leaves till quite recently, when some elemental or other misfortune killed them. I myself saw them in leaf but a few years ago. It seems only natural that the unique intruder should be the offspring of one among many elms planted by the Man of Ross, who, it will be remembered, was also the instigator, at any rate, of Pope's "heaven-directed spire," and was certainly the donor of one of the many chiming bells. Tradition, with fond embellishment no doubt, associates the destruction of the elm from which the tree afterwards sprouted with an act of sacrilege to John Kyrle's memory, and further pictures the offspring as shooting up above the very pew in

which the philanthropist had been accustomed to worship! What a miracle-working tree this would have been had the monks and their fairy tales been still in possession, and John Kyrle a real saint, and what tribute would have poured into Ross! The interior of the church is distinctly imposing, with its nave and three aisles, and triple-gabled roof supported by three arcades of pointed arches resting on slender cylindrical piers. There are some good Early English windows too, while the long, flat-roofed chancel is of a later period, and lit by large square-headed perpendicular windows.

There are, furthermore, some really striking monumental effigies to the Rudhalls of Rudhall, a family who flourished through the whole of the sixteenth and half of the seventeenth century, and erected the fine timbered manor-house still standing a mile or so eastward of the town. William Rudhall, Serjeant-at-law, *temp.* Henry VII., lies in robe and cap beside his wife in square head-dress, a pair of scissors at her girdle and the Tudor roses at her shoulder, all finely wrought in Italian marble. On another tomb of a century later another William Rudhall and his wife kneel together, with the usual filial procession of children behind them. The next

generation is represented by John Rudhall, clad in armour, and holding his wife by the hand. Finally, the next and last of the name, another William, who was an officer in the Royalist army, he who broke the bridge at Wilton to check the advance of Massey on Ross, is commemorated in a statue, clad like a Roman general grasping a wooden sword. This would seem a little hard on him, but a lady friend, out of affection for the original, appears to have been responsible for this singular conception of a cavalier. The far-spreading green graveyard, shaded in parts with fine elm and other timber, where sleep, in well-cared-for graves, so many generations of the folk of Archenfield, is not the least attractive of the possessions of Ross. In the north-east corner a ruinous cross bears the inscription: *Plague—Anno Domini 1677. Burials 315—Libera nos Domine*; while adjoining the churchyard, on the brow of the ridge, are some small public grounds and a terrace, also closely associated with the hero of Ross. Only of consequence here, since the terrace commands perfectly glorious views up-stream of the nearer windings of the Wye, and of practically its whole valley up to Hereford on the north and away westward over the ancient land of Archenfield to

the shadowy hills of Wales. Before parting with Ross and its presiding genius it is only fair to the latter, having had my little jest at his expense, to set to his credit some not generally recorded virtues that I came across recently in some old papers, which merely prove that his reputation for sanity in public matters was justified in his private life; for it seems that he hated crowds and routs, but was extraordinarily fond of snug dinners with a few cronies, and enjoyed a merry story. He also loved to make a good long evening of it, and was always loath to go to bed, which, as he lived to eighty-eight, is a standing refutation of what may be called the sleepy-head point of view. But then he was a bachelor, which must, I presume, be counted against him.

Ross saw troublous times like the rest of the country in the Civil War, but as Charles I. did not sleep a night in any of its beds, though a movement is on foot to make out that he did, and spare the town this reproach, I shall say nothing about it, unless to note that the Scottish army on their retreat from Hereford ate the citizens out of house and home without offering to pay the bill. Lastly, Ross, like Hereford, has its regatta, and is, moreover, the place where the oarsman, intent on rowing down

what the outer world generally understands by the Wye, hires his boat. Though Ross is called the *Gate of Wye*, it is not till it touches Goodrich, five miles by road and twelve by the bends of the river, that the great scenery of this last long stage is actually entered. Though all is charming, there is nothing much to detain us till we get there. The valley is perhaps a mile wide, and a road runs down upon each side of it. Upon the left high wooded hills maintain an imposing elevation and are the first faint suggestion of the Forest of Dean. At their feet, near the eastern road, lies the beautiful and conspicuous black and white mansion of Wythall, a quite remarkable specimen of untouched Tudor architecture, built by the Collins family, whose descendants still own it. Near the river is Hill Court, till recently the seat of the Powers, approached by a fine avenue, which the irrepressible Man of Ross, whose love of trees was as great as his love of his neighbours and sociable little dinners, is said to have designed. And the river running down between the Hill Court and Goodrich estates was the subject of a very famous lawsuit less than twenty years ago. Most people assume, and justly so, that owning one bank of a river carries with it the right of fishing, a privilege which on the Wye

with its salmon values is a serious matter. But the owners of Goodrich Castle, which had recently changed hands, found here and to their cost that there were exceptions sustained by immemorial law and custom. The suit made a great stir at the time, not at tea-tables, but among antiquarians, landowners, and lawyers, as well as fishermen and others. A statute of Richard II., if I remember rightly, carried the day, and the curious anomaly still holds good.

If Ross is the outer, Goodrich is the inner gate to the great glories of the Lower Wye. There are the court, the castle, and the church all lying half a mile or more from one another in the order named, upon the ridge which follows the river just before it enters at Kerne bridge into those deep winding gorges that have made it famous. Goodrich Court is a castellated residence less than a century old, but has some interest as the creation of that famous antiquary, Sir Samuel Meyrick, historian of Cardiganshire, who built it to contain his then unrivalled collection of armour and other treasures, now long dispersed. With its drum towers and Edwardian arch, it presents a most imposing front to the Vale below, and its modernity is in some sense softened by association with the

medieval knowledge and enthusiasm of its creator. In full view of this by no means ineffective suggestion of feudal days, on the point of an adjoining promontory and the edge of an almost perpendicular cliff above the winding river, stand the imposing ruins of the once great castle of Goodrich. It was built to command the ford below, where is also a ferry, which claims to have been the principal thoroughfare between England and the Welsh Marches. The parish of Walford, whose church is conspicuous on the flats beyond the river, derives its name (Wales-ford) from this immemorial crossing-place of the Wye. Henry IV., when Earl of Derby, was in the act of making the passage when he heard of the birth of his illustrious son at Monmouth, and gave the fortunate boatman who served him the monopoly of the ferry for life. The rock on which the castle stands is credited, for probably sufficient reasons, with having been both a Roman station and a British fort. But what we see here was the work and possession of the de Clares, the earliest exploiters of West Wales and afterwards Earls of Pembroke, one of whom was the famous Strongbow conqueror of Ireland. They included also the Earldom of Hereford, while another branch filled the still more potent position

of Earls of Gloucester and Lords of Glamorgan. No family approached in power that of the Clares when Earls of Gloucester. Goodrich, passing to the de Valences, fell by marriage, in the fourteenth century, to the Talbots, who owned it till long after a Norman castle had ceased to be either a necessary or desirable place of abode. In the Civil War, like all the Border castles, it was held for the king, and was the last in Herefordshire to surrender, which it did upon honourable terms to Col. Birch, who from a carrier rose to be a Colonel, and a big landowner, and now lies in marble splendour beneath the tapering spire of Weobley church, which he so embellished and where his newly acquired property lay. Mortars, throwing balls of 200 lb., are said to have been used in the siege, and their effect is still visible.

After this the castle was by order "sleighted," and the excellent Birch, no doubt, secured the lead from the roof, a valuable perquisite which helped many a deserving or undeserving Roundhead officer to found a family. The castle is defended upon its two accessible sides by a deep, dry moat, partly cut in the rock and now crossed by a causeway where the drawbridge once rose and fell. The gateway, still standing between two towers, is a

massive and elaborate specimen of its kind, and nearly twenty yards through. Two iron-bound oak gates and two portcullises, with the usual machicolations for pouring scalding liquids on the devoted heads of assailants, defended it. Around the inner court, the curtain walls of which are six or seven feet thick, the shell of many of the original buildings still stands erect. There are considerable remains of the chapel, including part of the chancel arch, and a couple of fourteenth-century windows. An Edwardian building, with subsequent Tudor additions, it had also a rood-loft, the only private chapel within knowledge, I believe, thus furnished. The Prisoners' Tower on the south-east still contains three chambers, for in the time of the Talbots it became, by royal licence, the common jail for the district of Archenfield. In the middle chamber, which tradition holds to have been reserved for prisoners of importance, there are some rude but extremely interesting figures scrawled on the jambs by the window. Chief is a man in fourteenth-century costume, with hawk and hound, and several detached sketches of birds and animals of the chase. These are popularly supposed to have been the product of weary hours passed by prisoners of condition,

while here incarcerated. There seems some reason to think, however, that the man is Henry IV., or Earl of Derby, as he was when he celebrated the birth of his son, Henry of Monmouth, at Goodrich, with a great feast; for the hart couchant is here, the well-known badge of the reigning king, Richard II.; also a swan, that of Henry himself, while a quite amazing representation of a woman and infant seems to point to the natal celebrations. A hawk standing on a partridge is the subject of another, which might well be grimly prophetic of the coming relations between Henry and Richard, while a peacock and some frisking rabbits complete the curious group that is fast becoming obliterated.

The square keep, the oldest portion, still defies the ages, and the somewhat venturesome opinion, hardly, I think, sustainable, is set forth in print that it is Saxon work. Saxons did not rear stone castles about the country. But of the little group of pre-Norman Normans, if the phrase be permissible, introduced by Edward the Confessor into Herefordshire, who built fortresses of some kind at Ewyas Harold, and Richard's Castle, and made themselves properly detested by the natives, Ralph the timid, nephew of the Confessor, was

the chief, and certainly owned Goodrich. The stone and style of the keep is different from the later work, but the idea of its being Saxon is impracticable. If it were pre-Conquest it would be the work of Ralph the Norman. But it is not even certain that this batch of the Confessor's French friends built their castles of stone. Mr. Horace Round goes so far as to say that even the later Normans had quite a long period of palisading on the top of tumps in Saxon fashion before they began to build stone castles in rural England. Goodrich was the official headquarters of the district of Archenfield, and its archives were deposited within the keep. The remains can be seen of the spacious banqueting-hall, nearly seventy feet in length, so can those of the solar, where the guests assembled before the feast, while the towers which contained the lords' and ladies' quarters are still in part extant.

For pure delight of the eye, however, there is nothing within this ivy-mantled ruin so fascinating as that distant prospect of Goodrich Court and woods, beautifully framed in a large window bereft of all its tracery in the Ladies' tower. The ivy riots on Goodrich as on Raglan[1] its next neighbour of consequence, and the deep dry moat is choked with

[1] Goodrich and Raglan have recently been restored by H.M. Office of Works; the ivy has been taken down and the Goodrich moat cleared.

a tangled mass of ferns and foliage. The slope beneath towards the river, which murmurs here upon the shallows of the classic ford, is richly draped with the foliage of ancient and diverse trees. The appeal of these old seats of the Mighty must surely reach, in some fashion, the most prosaic soul upon whom accident, or as the mere desire for an outing, has forced within them for a quiet half-hour. One fancies that one can in some sort of fashion catch the echoes of an Elizabethan ante-room or banqueting-hall; can hear their inmates speak the language and the small talk of a society not wholly out of touch with our own. But a man must be steeped indeed in that cryptic period, the Middle Ages, who can listen in fancy to the social babble of the Clares, the Marshalls, or the de Valences, when the ladies were at the table and the mellow stage but just arrived at! There was matter for manly table-talk with a vengeance. The conversational limitations of, let us say, the modern fox-hunter, would seem childish and almost banal, compared to the everyday experiences these sanguinary people had to draw upon, though no doubt the performance of hawk and hound, of crops and weather, filled up the gentler interludes. But we might perhaps imagine something of those stirring talks, probably boastful

and egotistic, of adventure against Rhys's and Eineons, Morgans, Madocs, and Llewelyns in the wilds of Wales; of months of hardship and fighting among half-savage Irish kernes; of hard knocks and long marches under Edward beyond the Tweed. But it is the lighter chat, when the ladies were there and the harpers were in the hall, that baffles. One expert, in a fat volume, tells us that its looseness was inconceivable to the modern. Another paints it as the pink of high-flown courtesy. It is all darkness any way, though grossly material, without much doubt. The harp and the crwth tickled their ears unquestionably, and warmed their hearts as the wine circled, but was it only with the passion of war or the fire of sensual love? One may wonder if these strenuous souls ever felt sentimental! So much at least as regards the Anglo-Normans, for we know that the Welsh chieftains of the time had imagination and sentiment enough, and that some of them in their peaceful interludes wrote sonnets to birds, flowers, and young women, to say nothing of battle and drinking-songs, which may be read to-day. But this combination of warrior in the field and Wordsworth by the hearth is a purely Welsh production.

The mischances among the Clares must have

been considerable, for five grandsons of Strongbow became Earls of Pembroke and Lords of Goodrich, one after the other. A lady of the de Valence family resided here for a long time ; and those who have studied her house accounts report that she lived sumptuously and with much magnificence. It is curious that a de Valence heiress carried the property to the Red Comyn of Badenoch, a claimant in 1306 to the throne of Scotland. We may take it as certain that no one so conspicuous in the north could have spared any time for hunting and hawking by the Wye. Moreover, he would have been execrated! About half Edward the First's armies in Scotland were made up of men from these Marches, and a Scotsman settled among them would have been unthinkable. It was not one of the Pembroke or Goodrich Clares, but the head and last of the Gloucester and Glamorgan family, a yet more powerful branch, that threw his life and youth away so recklessly at Bannockburn. The Talbots who followed made a great deal of money out of ransoms in the Hundred Years' War with France, and spent considerable sums on Goodrich, all the later work being due to them.

Half a mile on, and in the actual gate of the gorges, but away from the river, Goodrich church

lies beautifully posed upon a shelf in the sloping hill-side, well calculated to set off its ancient tower and spire. It was styled in the old days the church of "Castel Godrich." But its main interest for the wayfarer lies in its associations with Dean Swift, whose grandfather was vicar here all his days, save for an interval during the Civil War and ensuing period, when he distinguished himself by such conspicuous hostility to the Puritan party, that among the "Sufferings of the clergy," Parson Swift's were by no means the least. He was expelled from the vicarage, and retired to a small estate that he owned in the parish, where he had built a house of eccentric style and appearance, which may be seen to-day with his initials and the date 1636 upon it. It has three wings stretching out from a central block, each ending in a lofty, picturesque gable. This, however, was ruthlessly pillaged, again and again, even to the food and clothing of his ten children and his wife, who was a Dryden. The vicar was not only so militant in the pulpit as to stir up against him his Puritan neighbours, of whom the most ferocious was Captain Kyrle of Walford (now a farm-house), and nephew of Waller, and relative also of the excellent Man of Ross, but being of mechanical habit he

devised engines of war for the benefit of his cavalier friends, and the destruction of their mutual enemies. He arrived at Ragland when Charles I. was there, after Naseby, and informed the Governor that he had come to make the King a present of his coat. On being kindly informed that it was of no use to His Majesty, the vicar replied, "Then take my waistcoat." This was found to be stuffed with 300 gold pieces, which he had raised by mortgage on his little estate, and was gladly accepted. He lies beneath an altar tomb; and a chalice, presented by the famous Dean of St. Patrick's to his grandfather, is still used in the church. It was at Goodrich that Wordsworth encountered the little maid whom he has made immortal in "We are Seven." More than one old lady of the parish, it is said, has in recent times claimed identity with that precocious child. Wordsworth's admiration for the Wye was not the result of a casual tour. His wife's relations, the Hutchinsons, lived at Brinsop Manor, not very far from the river above Hereford, one of the most perfect and fascinating of all the moated granges on the Welsh Border. The poet and his wife paid it several visits, and on one of them he planted a cedar before the door, which is now a handsome tree. One of the family, well known to

me, has a clear recollection of the last of these visits of his famous uncle to Brinsop.

Where Kerne bridge crosses the river, close to the little station of that name on the Ross and Monmouth line, the Wye drives into that beautiful confusion of lofty precipitous hills which is always associated with the scenery of Symond's Yat. If you follow the Monmouth road from Kerne bridge it lands you on the banks of the Wye again within a mile, the river in the meantime having made a circuit of seven or eight, and is even there at the point of another loop still more remarkable, from which it hurries on to the famous Yat. No map, on which these strange gyrations are at least plain to the eye, can convey the perplexity which they occasion on a first actual acquaintance with the river; for the high hills, which are of course the cause of them and conceal the situation when one is on the spot, have small significance on canvas. No road follows the river through these mazes for any distance, till it escapes, a dozen miles below, into the open trough that leads down to Monmouth, for there is no urgency of traffic amid these up-reared woods and crags. But the railway, by help of tunnelling, breaks through the barriers, and for a long distance gives the passenger an admirable

passing glimpse of one cliff or the other, and to the utter confusion, further increased by the short tunnels, of any clear notion of the scheme of the river he might wish to carry away with him. Putting the boat trip aside, which has of course both advantages and drawbacks, you must walk this country to gather of its best, by river-side, by hill-top, and by cliff-edge. The variety of path and of aspect is delightful, and no step of it will be regretted, or forgotten. The first straggling double-horned loop of the river encloses the high irregular semi-wild mass of Coppett hill in one horn, and in the other the woody parklands of Courtfield, with the church of the Parish of Welsh Bicknor, which last is identical with the whole peninsula, nestling by the river bank.

I have been here at most of the leafy seasons, but am thankful that my freshest and most recent memories are those of autumn tints and brilliant sunshine. In the sterner scenery of the Upper Wye one can find compensations, nay, immense ones, in gloom and clouds, but in these vast curtains of gorgeous foliage hung from hill-top after hill-top, above all in the panoplied splendour of October, sunshine is indispensable. No pleasanter introduction to this upheaved chaos of limestone,

torn and rent by primeval forces, and by nature decked so lavishly for our admiration, could be essayed than by a walk to Symond's Yat from Goodrich, over the shoulder of Coppett hill, and thence dropping down through the delightful sylvan and meadowy ways of the peninsula parish of Welsh Bicknor.

Entered upon from here by steep leafy lanes the famous Coppett hill opens out beyond them into those spreading, fern-clad, coppice-sprinkled slopes, which form such characteristic interludes between the otherwise wooded walls that entrench the Wye. Green tracks of sheep-nibbled sward lead you, at easy grades, through beds of russet bracken, and if the migrants of these bosky uplands have fled, the larks still spring rejoicing, and the peewits swoop and cry. It is worth the trifling detour, to achieve the summit where near a patch of fir wood, a lonely cottage commands a prospect into several counties and cultivates an appalling intimacy with every fury of the elements. From here you can look all over Herefordshire, and mark the various heights of the Black Mountains and the Sugar Loaf, and the rugged Skerrig, and the Blorenge, and other hills about the Vale of Usk. But what is more to our purpose, you can see the Wye forging

back through green strips of meadow under woody steeps to Whitchurch, and curving southward again on its course behind the nearer ridges, in the most eccentric of all its strange vagaries. Eastward, the skirts of the Forest of Dean clothe or half clothe all the nearer hills; while northward, the river comes gleaming beautifully down the long meadowy trough from the broken woody heights, in whose bosom we so lately lingered among the worthies and the treasures of Ross. Dropping down the easterly slope of Coppett hill towards the lower and more ornate portions of the Wye-enveloped parish of Welsh Bicknor, the first signs of those snug squatter homesteads that are such an engaging feature of the lower reaches begin to show themselves. So many of them are now freeholds, intermingled with others of like character and appearance, that are held on various easy terms, they form practically one indistinguishable and altogether pleasing feature in the romantic scenery of the Wye. Here are two or three on the lower slopes of Coppett, stone-built, flag-roofed, with bounteous garden, well-laden orchards, and clean acre or so of grass paddock, all suggestive of the leisurely care, and the simple wants of two or three generations of secure possession. The

wicket opens on to the crisp turf of the hill-side, where grazing facilities for horse, cow, or donkey are no doubt free, or easy, and where the bronzed fern is even now being scythed in patches for bedding the modest byres and stables about the hill-foot. Something better, as a rule, than a labourer's cottage, and something less than a small farm, these bowery snuggeries, so plentifully distributed all down the lofty banks of Wye, make greatly for its further adornment. Unfortunately, owing to their peculiar conditions, they don't contribute much to the solution of pressing economic problems. But a word more on this may be said in the next chapter, where we shall meet them in greater abundance.

It only remains for the present to descend the lower slope of the hill, where gnarled thorns and scattered ash and birch spring up amid the gorse and bracken, and follow the burnished canopy of beech foliage which traces the course of the road into the woody park lands of Courtfield. A mile over these, through rolling pastures and leafy glades, where deer are feeding, and set near the point of the promontory which forms the estate and parish, is Courtfield house, the property of the ancient Catholic family of Vaughan. But it has

further interest as the place whither Henry the Fifth was sent after his birth at Monmouth to be reared under the care of the Countess of Salisbury. Welsh Bicknor church nestles in most picturesque and secluded fashion on the banks of the river beneath a wall of overhanging woods. In the church, mostly rebuilt, is an ancient monumental effigy, traditionally assigned to that noble nurse of Henry Fifth just alluded to, but probably of much older date. The Wye must be crossed hereabouts by any one bound for Symond's Yat, and the railway bridge at the mouth of the tunnel under Coppett hill will serve the occasion. Just across it is the little station of Lydbrook—the village itself being within sight higher up—whence a line, which for a moment strikes a slightly discordant note, runs up into the forest. But it is a small matter, and soon forgotten. Indeed, the wanderer in these labyrinths may be thankful to have the opportunity of verifying his future course if this be to English Bicknor and Symond's Yat, for it is a complicated and tortuous one. The railway hurries off to its beautiful run along the river banks beneath Coldwell woods and cliffs to another tunnel beneath the Yat, where it cuts the neck of a five-mile loop of the river and rejoins its

returning streams at the village of Symond's Yat, within 600 yards. But the walker's faintly traced path aims for the high ground, and climbs the ridge of Coldwell by fields and copses, before it shapes itself into those amazing tangles of crag and foliage, that are but the beginning of a long succession of like displays. In crossing the river we leave Herefordshire behind us. Welsh Bicknor is significant of the ancient racial characteristics of Archenfield; and as the opposing Gloucestershire hill is surmounted, a cluster of pleasant cottages among orchards, a farm, a church, and an exposed manor-house, constitute the rival village of English Bicknor. This is one of many of such racial survivals in Border names. The people who worshipped in this little hill-top church spoke English. Those who gathered across the river down in the valley were of the other tongue, in the days, probably, when Henry IV. was feasting at Goodrich and the future victor of Agincourt lay in his cradle in their own parish. Through a farmyard and across a field or two and with slight warning one is on the summit of the long broken wall of woodland known as Coldwell rocks. Most of the river from hereabouts downward and a good deal of the adjoining country is now

Crown property. The walks, which must take some making and not a little keeping up, through these miles of tangled declivities, are no doubt a national concern, and the humblest tax-payer who treads them may enjoy his millionth part of proprietorship. At any rate, no sense of rambling these wild woods on sufferance need oppress the hypersensitive or socialistic soul.

It is not merely an impressive, but an uncommon path that winds about the jagged edges of Coldwell rocks,—peering down all the time through delightful depths of infinitely varied underwood, which clings to more or less precipitous gorges, filling the fissures and twisting about the summit of ivy-clad, upstanding crags of grey limestone. Betimes, there is a more gently shelving interlude, where larger trees of oak or beech find a patch of soil and a quiet resting-place, amid the obvious struggle for existence that this maze of gnarled undergrowth wages with the hard and savage rocks. Broadly speaking, these splintered cliffs fall from fifty to two hundred feet on to a less abrupt bank of foliage, that with a further descent of twice or thrice that distance sweeps down to the water's edge. But looking upward from below it is the entire absence of formality which gives the

peculiar charm. Cliff and crag, shaking off here and there the insistent underwood, spring from it in great walls and pinnacles, in pulpits, and castle towers of naked rock. Looking down from the summit, if you are among the fortunate minority who know something of their own country, you will remind yourself that there are scenes in Wales and the North in plenty, not less rich in colouring and foliage, more actually rugged and on a far more imposing scale—and yet—there is nothing else quite like this. It is the Wye, and that is all there is to be said; and yet more the Lower Wye with a quality all its own, and quite inimitable.

One remembers, too, with almost a start, that this is Gloucestershire. And as the eye of memory roams that delectable county, with its west midland type of landscape, its Cotswolds and its Upper Thames belonging to almost another land and to wholly other standards, and we then turn and look down over this sweep of crag and foliage to a salmon river sparkling in the gorge below, the physical capacity of this matchless little island, that in a single county can show such infinite variety, moves one afresh. This is in truth the Lower Wye, and could be nothing else, though only the beginning of it. Walking on this strange and weird ridge-

way, by a devious path through its wild underwood, one remembers Aberedw, and calls to mind the glistening shallows of Glasbury, with the solemn folds of the Black Mountains towering above them. One remembers Doldowlod, too, and the mouth of the Elan, and the wild valley from Llangurig to its fountain springs on Plinlimmon. But all these belong to another atmosphere, that of the mountain and the wild. They have their prototypes more or less, and happily so, in all our mountain counties. But this Lower Wye is, of its kind, gloriously unique. Nor is it any slight to the rolling ridges of mainly small oak trees which the Forest of Dean spreads towards the Severn valley upon the east, or to the warm and varied landscape that Herefordshire and Monmouth spread out towards Wales, to say that these deep-channelled, tortuous gorges savour of the unexpected, and in a provincial sense of the exotic, to a quite extraordinary degree.

Here and there a break in this fringe of the underwood, through which the ridge-path runs, opens out a rough descent of a few yards to the feathered mossy summit of one of these limestone pulpits, whence you could pitch a biscuit on to the tree tops below, and what is more, get rare glimpses along the face of the woody steep,

where other pinnacles and pulpits, hoary and grey, stand waist deep in the flare of autumn foliage. The beech is everywhere in its rich brown; the oak, later to turn as it is tardier to leaf, supplies its blend of green and russet; the ash flaunts everywhere its brilliant saffron patches, while the yew, a hardy native and conspicuous always in this Wye cliff scenery, with its sombre note of contrast, puts a finishing and characteristic touch. Much of this is dwarfed and gnarled timber, and for this very reason the smaller growths and tangled brush usually obscured in woodland scenes, thrust their foliage to the surface and enrich its colouring. Looking down the rugged, mossy steeps, under the tangled foliage and through the gnarled and twisted trunks that bear it—the matting ferns beneath, the ivy and wild clematis climbing and streaming in festoons above—the thought of fauns and satyrs, and all the uncanny shapes with which immemorial fancy loves to people the untamed, untrodden forest, comes up here irresistibly. Innumerable birds gather to feast on the berries of these Wye woods in autumn. I have nowhere seen so many missel-thrushes together as once upon the Wynd cliff. This delightful walk along the fringe of Coldwell Cliffs terminates at last upon

that striking plateau of rock immediately above Symond's Yat, to which every visitor that the railway discharges at the station on the river bank, makes a point of climbing up to. Here, bewilderment is always blended with admiration. For the three reaches of the Wye that glimmer in various directions so far below may well be, as in truth they are, the despair of the uninitiated as to whither they go and whence they come. It is one thing to look at the flat surface of a map, but quite another to stand up here for the first time, as thousands do, with no particular topographical notion of the district at command, and be immediately challenged, as it were, by the river to explain its strange contortions. From the Yat you get a fine backward prospect of the Coldwell rocks, over which we have just come, with the river running beneath their woody feet, to the south-west. On another side you see it forging east of north, through ribbon-like meadows, with the varied sweeps of wood and fern and turf, that fold so gracefully upward, to the distant tuft of trees that crowns the southern point of the Coppett ridge ; while at the western foot of the Yat, having run northward, far out of sight, by Whitchurch towards Goodrich, the Wye may be seen racing back under the Great Doward to the rapids

of New Weir immediately beneath us. It seems hardly necessary to repeat that from here, as from any of these high ridges, you can look over the leafy upland of the Forest of Dean to the east, and to the blue hills of Wales on the west; for it is the foreground and the middle distance, the nearer glories that here chiefly hold one. The shining of so many rivers as it may well seem, in their deep green troughs immediately beneath one's feet; the splendid riot in every quarter, high and low, from the river's brink to the mountain's brow, of autumn woods; the wondrous play in these deep leafy gorges of sun and shadow on crag and meadow, grove and stream; the opulence, in short, of a warm, luxuriant, and prolific country blended as nowhere else in England with the rugged features of some mountain wild. But of all the many and varied prospects of the river, the most worthy, I think, to be held in remembrance is that confronting the wayfarer as he descends the western slope of the Yat towards the village. For hence he will look right down the gorge where the now large river flashes away southward in a succession of sparkling rapids and surging salmon pools, between lofty precipitous hills, wooded from their summit virtually to the water's edge, and like

the rest, buttressed with jagged and castellated crags of limestone rock.

Symond's Yat, once known as New Weir, as a place of habitation and resort, consists of a small station, a bright little hotel with pleasant garden set upon the river bank, and a few cottages perched about on the almost precipitous face of the woody hill, all mainly concerned with the needs of the tourist. Across the ferry, which plies above the head of the rapids, and set picturesquely upon ledges in the steep slopes of the Great Doward, and along the river bank, are a further store of dwellings, mostly modest, though generally elaborated somewhat for the benefit of the summer visitor. The Yat is most emphatically the place for a week of leisurely and enchanting half-day rambles along both woodland and upland ways, which can be explored in no other fashion. The salmon fishers foregather at the inn, *The Royal*, when the water is in order. A few trout haunt the rapid streams below the island, and though the chub, as elsewhere upon Wye, are the most pushful after the angler's fly, you may see fine grayling rising any autumn afternoon where the rapids cease from troubling and the amber water swishes noiselessly over the willow-bordered gravelly runs below them. The

SYMOND'S YAT

actual weir, which gave the name still attaching to the reach below Symond's Yat, has long vanished, and the river has relapsed into the strenuous courses which it was no doubt designed to check. For three miles it rolls along in majestic curving sweeps, between precipitous walls of wood and crag many hundred feet in height, and scenes of beauty that the artist spares me any futile effort to depict. It is Coldwell rocks and woods over again; the beech, the oak, the ash, the larch, the yew, giving place to willow and alder, where they actually touch the stream; the same deep ravines and castellated crags, one of which last, an insulated fragment, springs full forty feet into the air, just above the Yat. The precipitous sides of the Great and Little Doward hills account for the right-hand wall of the river, and on the summit of the latter is a well-defined and obviously important British camp, whose outer defences are skilfully involved with the abrupt face of the hill. This camp, like others hereabouts, seems naturally associated with the stubborn defence of the Silurians under Caractacus against the Roman arms, which Tacitus has made more familiar to present generations than is most of the shadowy story of the Imperial legions in Britain. Traditions of a great defeat of the Britons

linger here, and a spot by the river is still called "The Slaughter." A line of crags which buttress the last wooded cliff that the river washes is known as the "Seven Sisters." Soon after this, the gorge is modified into a deep green valley that, still overhung by woody hills of considerable height, leads quickly down by farms and country seats, to the wide, flat-bottomed bowl, in which the old town of Monmouth is so exquisitely set.

CHAPTER V

MONMOUTH TO TINTERN

The valley high road from Ross to Chepstow which abandoned, it may be remembered, the impenetrable chaos of the Symond's Yat country in despair at Goodrich, joins the river again two miles above Monmouth, where the tortuous gorges end, and the accessible vale begins. As already intimated, there is here a comparatively open interlude till, a mile below Monmouth town, the great hills once more thrust their feet together, and the Wye runs between them, though in rather less sinuous fashion, for fifteen miles to Chepstow. And in this interlude, amid encircling hills, fashioned in many shapes and of varying heights, from six to eight hundred feet, with the broad Wye surging cheerily upon the stones beneath its ancient bridge of many arches, the town of Monmouth is as choicely planted as any quiet country town with

a proud name could wish to be. Its claims to note are many. There is Geoffrey of Monmouth, for one, whose imaginative pen has lent so much inspiration to the Arthurian classics, and Harry of Monmouth for another, who needs, I trust, no note of introduction. The Monmouth cap again—that popular headgear when the sumptuary laws at least restrained the more tasteless portion of the populace from tawdry horrors—had its origin here, though the business went subsequently to the Severn. And lastly, Monmouth gave its name to a county carved by Henry VIII. mainly out of the Marcher lordships of Upper and Lower Gwent, and in defiance of the obvious, accredited, in later days at any rate, to England instead of Wales—a paradox recently in part corrected. In physical qualities, which in its warm red soils, and brilliant pastures, its woody heights, and babbling streams are wholly good ones, Monmouthshire is akin to Hereford, though much more Welsh, and when you cross the Usk into the mountains wholly so.

No far-reaching structural eyesores mar the prospect or render the town unworthy of its delicious setting. As you look down upon it from any of its seven or more lofty hills, no disfiguring detail disturbs the serene repose in which it

THE SEVEN SISTERS

sits beside the bright streams of Wye, or strikes a jarring note amid the rich colouring of a rather languorous country and the lofty elevations of a semi-mountainous one. The lavish foliage that mantles everywhere above its eastern heights is not unconcerned, it is true, with the old bounds of the Forest of Dean. But the collieries and foundries of that quite ancient region of industry are comparatively far away, and keep their smirching hand off the still virgin banks of Wye. Industrial Welsh Monmouthshire, again, is yet more remotely to the westward, and has its quarrel only with the lower reaches of the Usk. Monmouth, indeed, has something of an advantage even over Ross, which has captured, I think, the tourist's ear more effectively for indirect reasons. For looking northward from Ross you have the open country through which the Wye approaches it, in winsome fashion, to be sure, but not in its greater moods. Looking up from Monmouth, on the other hand, you see, looming comparatively near by, the finely grouped heights, out of which the river breaks into the nearer vale ; while facing downwards, at an even closer range, are the upstanding hills into whose bosom it vanishes once again, to be there enfolded amid almost equal glories.

With the exception of a fragment of the old Priory building, where Geoffrey of Monmouth is supposed, upon scant authority, to have written his daring and romantic chronicle, the bridge of the Monnow, with its curious gateway, and the portion of the adjoining fortress where the victor of Agincourt was born, are almost the only links with a remote past that Monmouth has to show. The statue of its greatest son stands in full armour, as it should do, in front of the town hall. The confluence of the stream, which gave name to both town and county, will be suggestive enough to any one who can follow up with the eye of memory its delightful mazes to their fountain head, in those Black Mountain passes whose backs we contemplated from Glasbury and Hay. The Monnow is, in truth, the gem of all the Border tributaries of Wye and Severn. How its many earlier affluents gridiron the slopes of the Black Mountains, with their deep-channelled and delicious valleys, has already been briefly noted. How it bears their united waters downward, in riotous or purling currents upon its own stony bed, sparkling through the Chase of Kentchurch, and the meads of Grosmont, or churning in that long, deep, trough between the soaring heights of Graig and Garway to lave

the ivied ruins of Skenfrith, is here outside our path.

The Monnow to-day is all unknown to the world, unless by name to some fraction of that part of it which is interested in trout and grayling. But in the days of old half a dozen or more successive English monarchs knew the Monnow almost as well as they knew Windsor Park. They had to. It is futile, I fear, in this place to record the fact that it marked the strategic line of "the three castles," which, in the still considerable remains of Grosmont, Whitecastle, and Skenfrith, remind a few antiquarians of the significance of this old frontier between kings, earls, or constables, and the semi-independent turbulent Lords of the March. Henry III. and a large army, mainly of foreigners, fought a battle, or rather executed a *sauve qui peut*, in their night-shirts, on a winter's dawn, from the banks of the Monnow at Grosmont, before a surprise-party organised by Llewelyn the Great—not his grandson of Builth fame—and his Marcher allies. At the same spot the forces of Glyndwr, in the sixth year of his devastating wars, received a staggering blow at the hands of young Henry of Monmouth and the Talbots of Goodrich, from which his

cause never really recovered. On the banks of the Monnow, too, where he had another daughter married to a Scudamore of Kentchurch, the Welsh hero is stoutly held to have spent part of that mysterious close of his life, to which Monnington-on-Wye, it will be remembered, lays a more than equal claim. But even the enlightened tourist cares little probably for Border wars, and will seldom have troubled to realise the national consequence of this Wye basin in the days of the Henrys and the Edwards.

The balance of power has, of a truth, shifted since Henry the Fifth began to raise the towers of Raglan, eight miles to the westward of his birth-town, whither the tide of the touring public sets always heavily. For Raglan is well preserved as a ruin, and its weather-beaten stone is extremely beautiful. But in Border story it scarcely counts. It was begun too late for much serious import, and, as a matter of fact, most of it is seventeenth-century work, and its main historical interest lies in its association with Charles I. and the Civil War. A more than common one, too, was this, not because the castle stood a siege against the Parliament, and was about the last fortress to surrender, but because the Beaufort family, its

owners, then represented by the old Marquis of Worcester, were far and away the largest financial contributors to the Royal cause, and Charles sheltered with them here for a long time after Naseby fight. The curious embattled gateway on the old Monnow bridge has a foreign air about it, for the simple reason, no doubt, that such survivals are frequent on the Continent, and extremely scarce in England. The credit of its erection goes to Edward I. during his Welsh wars. In the ancient-looking suburb of Over-Monnow, across the bridge, a reference, at least, should be made to the little Norman church of St. Thomas, greatly restored, though in part upon the old lines. The black oak pews and galleries of its sombre interior almost disarm conventional criticism of such things by their quaintness. The little church formerly belonged to the Guild of Monmouth Capmakers, which articles, according to old Fuller, were the "most warm and profitable coverings of men's heads in this island." The great Eliza ordained that every one, but a few high personages, should wear them on saints' days and Sundays.

The Kymin, some seven hundred feet above the river on the eastern side, is the vantage point usually sought by the natives of Monmouth in

quest of the widest outlook on the world, available within easy range. Wide as this is, ranging from the Glamorgan Mountains and the Brecon Beacons and the heaved-up, shadowy masses, through which the Usk comes breaking out of the heart of Wales to the most northern bounds of Herefordshire, the eye will rest even longer on the delightful vale below, on the little town, so old in story, grouped around its high tapering church spire, on its river shimmering in bright coils above and below. There is also a monument up here to certain eighteenth-century British admirals of noted service in North American seas—Boscawen, "wry-necked Dick," as the sailors called him, among them. The fact of his being the father of a Duchess of Beaufort no doubt inspired this patriotic dedication. But there are several naval memorials along this Welsh Border, erected, so some wags have declared, by a grateful squirearchy in token of the high prices they got for their oak timber, which, in those stirring days, was in great request. Beyond the Kymin, too, is the Buckstone, which once rocked, but, being displaced by over-merry beanfeasters, was put back at immense expense, though to rock no more.

Monmouth, like so many similar towns, had its Laurence Sherriff or, if this is enigmatic to most

people but Rugbeians, its Dick Whittington, who proved not merely a prosperous but patriotic scion. For William Jones of Newland, a neighbouring parish, having failed, so legend says, as a pot-boy at Monmouth, went penniless to London in 1615, and eventually emerged as a wealthy haberdasher, with the not uncommon desire to combine charity with immortality. He was a bit of a joker, too, this particular Jones; for he went down to Newland, his native village, so the legend continues, in the guise of a ragged pauper, soliciting alms, with a view to ascertaining whether their hearts were sufficiently in the right place to merit his good intentions. Apparently they were very far from being so, for they spurned his solicitations, and kicked him out. He then put the people of Monmouth to the same rather trying test, out of which they emerged triumphantly; whereupon he cast off his rags, and blessed the men of Monmouth, and gave them of his substance to the extent of an Almshouse for twenty inmates, and a grammar school, with good and sufficient endowment, both of which foundations are flourishing at this day. Quite a number of illustrious families have had their rise in this prolific soil. The little manor-house of Allt-yr-Ynys, some way up the Monnow,

is the cradle of the Cecils (Sytsyllts). The Herberts are, of course, here still, and three noble houses have blossomed from their stock. If there can be any question of the illogical classification of Monmouth as an English county, an entertaining illustration, familiar in these parts, of the Welsh characteristics inherent in its eighteenth-century squires may, with the reader's leave, be quoted.

Now the Progers (Ap-Roger) of Wernddu high up the Monnow, and the Powells (Ap-Howel) of Perther nearer to Monmouth were cousins, and both houses claimed to be the senior branch of the same stem, which also produced some illustrious Herberts. This was a sore point, and no little friction was caused by such radical differences of opinion. Relations had never been actually ruptured on this account, but merely simmered in a perennial state of tension. It so happened that on a certain occasion Proger of Wernddu was entertaining an English guest in the halls of his ancestors. They were enjoying themselves in Monmouth, whither they had ridden, and when the heel-taps had been drunk, and it was time to turn their horses' heads towards Wernddu, some dozen miles distant, the Englishman remarked upon the lateness of the hour, and the threatening state of the weather.

ABOVE MONMOUTH

The sanguine and perhaps well-primed Proger, however, took a less gloomy view, and without apparent misgiving held out as a refuge, in case of need, his cousin's house at Perther. The Saxon proved more weatherwise, and the rain fell in sheets soon after the pair had left the town. So the drenched and benighted horsemen repaired, with a qualified sense of thankfulness, to the cousinly portals of Perther. But on arriving there the place was silent, and the household, including the squire, had obviously retired to rest. After some vigorous demonstrations, an upper window was at length opened, and no less a person than the owner himself put his head out and inquired who the devil was making that uproar at so unseasonable an hour.

"It is only I," was the reply in propitiatory accents, "your cousin Proger of Wernddu, who has come with a friend to your hospitable door, hoping you will give us shelter on this inclement night."

"Ho! it is you, cousin! I will do so with pleasure. But—stay! you must first admit that I am head of the family."

"What is that you said?" called out the squire of Wernddu, for the storm made hearing difficult.

"Why, that I will certainly let you in if you

will admit that I am head of the family," shouted back his cousin.

"That," retorted Proger, "I will never do, though it rain swords and daggers. I would ride much farther than Wernddu rather than lower the consequence of my family in that fashion," and with that he touched his horse with the spur, and prepared once more to face the storm.

"Stop a moment, cousin," called out Mr. Powell, "have you not admitted that the first Earl of Pembroke was the youngest son of Perther, and will you set yourself above an earl?"

"True," replied the unshakable Proger, "I must give place to the Earl of Pembroke as a peer of the realm, but still, though a peer, he is of the youngest branch of my family, being descended from the fourth son of Wernddu, who was your ancestor, and settled at Perther, whereas I am from the eldest son."

"Well, then, cousin Proger, I have nothing more to say, except good-night to you"; and the squire began to close the window.

"Stop a moment, Mr. Powell," now called out the soaking and impatient stranger, "do at least let me in; I will promise not to dispute with you about our families."

"Pray, sir," said the other, "who are you, and whence come you?"

"My name is so and so, and I come from the county of B——."

"Oho, an Englishman! It would be curious indeed, sir, should I dispute with a Saxon about families. No, sir, you must suffer for the obstinacy of your friend, and a very good-night and pleasant ride to you both."

The Trothy, a noisy brook from the west, joins the Wye hard by Monmouth, and near its banks stands Troy House, a picturesque, rambling, half ancient, half early-Georgian building, till recently used by its owners the Dukes of Beaufort as an occasional residence in this portion of their immense estates, vastly diminished though these are of late in the Wye valley by the Crown purchases. A mile or so below Monmouth, the big hills, which on the east have never dipped, press together again, and the river enters the long final gorge, carrying with it both the railroad and highway to Chepstow. At Redbrook a ravine breaks the eastern wall of the valley, dividing the counties of Gloucester and Monmouth, and a tin-plate factory with its rubbish-heaps makes the one brief blot upon the otherwise virgin banks of Wye.

Hence for a long distance, with just space for a narrow strip of meadow upon one side or the other, the river runs from tumbling salmon pool to long reaches of gliding, untroubled water. Rising to a height of seven or eight hundred feet, the hills on either side, though neither precipitous nor wholly wood-clad as in the upper gorges, have, for the most part, only just sufficient slope to give firm holding to the delightful irregularity of orchard, pasture, woodland, and ferny brake that form their covering; while here and there upon some natural ledge the small cottage homestead of the country sends up its faint smoke wreath. And thus shoulder behind shoulder, curve after curve, this uncommon blend of the homely and the majestic, the luxuriant and the imposing, reveals itself, as this queen of rivers, still sounding from time to time upon some rocky barrier the hoarse music of its mountain birth, rolls on to meet the tide.

Nowhere, perhaps, on the Lower Wye is there a more characteristic stretch of the kind last alluded to, than upon its right bank between Monmouth and Llandogo, a district mainly covered by the parishes of Trelleck and Penallt. Up on the top, seven hundred feet above, is the plateau country; itself scooped out not a little by the shallow

TINTERN ABBEY

valleys of the brooks, that in their later and more impetuous descent cut the bosky face of the steep slope into deeper channels. Farming lands of normal type lie all about, merging into a hinterland of rougher broken country, of ridgy uplands, shaggy with fern and gorse and the smaller woodland growths; a country of twisting lanes and slender population, and slight touch with any traffic but its own. Such aloofness is inevitable in a district protected from the outer world by such prodigious ascents—whether in the long drag upon the graded highway, or the steep, shorter paths by wood and brake and meadow. A country-house or two stands upon the rounded brink of this gigantic bank, its glorious prospect still further embellished by as fine timber as any you may see upon the river level. There are more sycamores of great stature in a single group at the Argoed, for instance, than any known to me in England. But it is not the plateau country, unconventional, secluded, and interesting though it be, that distinguishes these heights of Wye in a human sense, but the nature of the habitations, that almost everywhere, and nowhere more delightfully than here, cling to their brink and slopes. Most of this Wye-side property, in great part, as related, taken

over recently by the Crown, belonged to the Dukes of Beaufort. Easy-going landlords, they permitted squatting in former days at nominal rents, together with the subsequent acquisition of the freehold on easy terms, in this steep, shaggy country of no great prairie value as ordinary farming land. The result, at any rate, as we noticed in Welsh Bicknor, is most felicitous, both from a material and an æsthetic point of view. All along the higher slope, in Penallt and Trelleck parishes, and down the winding, densely-wooded, gorge-like valley of the Whitecross brook that here cleaves the slope, these little homesteads cluster thickly. Most of them are stoutly fashioned of solid stone, but inevitably, and fortunately from their diverse origin, vary sufficiently in style, scale, and simple adornment, as well as in the nature of their surroundings, to present a succession of wholly charming pictures. Some are roofed with mossy stone flags, some with red tiles, others with thatch or the less alluring slate. Some are white-washed, some are touched with gayer colours, others clad with Virginia creeper, jessamine, honeysuckle, or climbing roses; while old sandstone walls, bursting at every fissure with fern and flower, divide betimes their luxuriant garden patches from the lane.

There is little of the regularity of a village among any of these groups. But they squat about for the most part at their own will, with some original eye, no doubt, to the earliest rough lanes or paths that pushed their way through the tangle which once flourished here, and are now reasonable arteries. Here entrenched—each one behind its leafy barrier of privet hedge, or flowering wall, or fruiting orchard, and bright display of garden stuff, with an acre, or a few acres as may be, of paddock or tillage—the sight is good for the eye of either artist or economist. There are skeletons in the cupboard, no doubt in plenty, but the air of snug possession, where a genial clime responds to accustomed hands, is all about them. And this appeal is none the weaker for the romantic situation in which these little freeholds have so fortuitously grouped themselves. Winding from one to another, leafy, tortuous lanes edge along the hill-side, to escape later over the hill-top to some established highway in the hinterland, or to dive riverwards for hundreds of feet down some leafy dingle, and in company with a mountain stream to pass the wicket gate of another dozen such abodes of, let us hope, secure and modest comfort.

There is no particular solution of any pressing

social problem it is to be feared in these Wye-side homesteads. Among those that have a few acres attached, scarcely any are the sole means of subsistence to their owners or occupants. Most of these have a trade or calling of some kind. They come of a race that for generations have been in touch with iron and coal, with forestry and salmon fisheries, with small industries of various kinds; for the Forest of Dean, that for centuries has promoted such things, can be seen from their doorsteps, clothing the hills in the middle distance beyond the river. But these folks are not miners and colliers in the ordinary sense, even if some are by occasion, with all the lack of grace and polish that is associated with this invaluable type of humanity. On the contrary, they are a people who, quite irrespective of their avocations, which are many and various, possess those virtues, or at any rate a natural refinement in a very high degree. Even the wayfarer would be struck with something of this in their frank courtesy, but much more convincing is the verdict of those who live among these Gwentian country-folk, and know them well.

Away at the back of this country, and, even higher still, lies a stretch of secluded uncon-

ventional and broken landscape, merging into the commons of Penallt and Trelleck ; a far-extending waste of heather and ferns, of birch and oak, of rowan and fir, which spreads over many ridges and culminates in the shaggy brow of the Beacon, which in this high country is lord of all. At Craig-y-dorth, a ridge just to the northward, Glyndwr, with a Welsh army, in the late spring of 1404, defeated the forces of the Earl of Warwick, who had quite recently gained a victory over him in Montgomeryshire. It was a hard-fought battle, and resulted in such disastrous harrying of the Border counties, that Shropshire and some other districts had to eat the leek and purchase immunity from the Welsh leader's onslaughts by a money payment. The season following this battle above the Wye was Owen's greatest moment. He was practically supreme in Wales. His bards burst into triumphant strains, and above all the Red Iolo—

> Immortal fame shall be thy meed,
> Due to every glorious deed,
> Which latest annals shall record,
> Beloved and victorious Lord.
> Grace, wisdom, valour, all are thine,
> Owain Glyndowerdy divine.

A back-country road runs from Monmouth to

Tintern through these uplifted ridges, and passes the church of Trelleck, which is interesting, and near three curious monoliths. But these by-places are the haunt of the leisurely sojourner upon the Wye, and indeed, you do not fully realise the great qualities of the river till you have sought them from the hill-top as well as encountered them in the vale. The ordinary traveller is seldom likely to drag himself up the really stupendous climb, and wander amid the seclusion of these leafy labyrinths. It is enough, probably, for most that a good road follows the river bank, opening up fresh beauties at every bend, till at the river-side village of Llandogo, nestling beneath a woody shoulder, where muddy banks begin to betray the influence of the tide, a small sea-going craft or two is quite likely to be waiting upon its flow. But at Bigsweir, a mile above, there is as yet little sign of this; for the river still rushes boisterously around a small willowy island into a wide, frothing corner pool overhung with oaks, above whose foliage, at the base of the hill, rises an ivy-mantled manor-house of Queen Anne complexion. Above its chimneys hangs a high curtain of verdant turf and russet fern, and beyond the fern the reddening woods grip the mountains to the sky-line. At

Bigsweir, however, a wide rift opens in the high eastern wall of the river, swelling sharply upwards to the village of St. Briavels, which caps the ridge of the hill. The church tower, and what is left of the ancient castle, stand out conspicuously at this great elevation as a landmark far up and down the valley and from every hill-top in the country. The castle was first raised in the time of Henry I., and together with its tributary the Forest of Dean fell by a grant of Matilda to that Milo Earl of Hereford whose name rings down the ages of Border history. At the edge of this immemorial crown-land it has always stood, after the varying manner of succeeding ages, as the source of power and authority over its inhabitants. Though the Speech House, set in a lovely sylvan spot amid the forest, has been in later times the official centre, forest courts were held till quite recently at St. Briavels. The castle is now embodied in a private house, but in connection with the church a whimsical custom prevailed till within the last century. Now an adjoining tract known as the Hudnalls had been early granted to the parish for common grazing. As an equivalent, however, to those poor people who had no beasts to graze there, such as had were assessed at a penny a piece, which was expended

upon bread and cheese for their benefit. This assuredly would not alone be worthy of record here, but the manner in which, for generations, the provender was distributed, would entertain, I think, other than mere antiquaries. For the clerk on the appointed Sunday, taking up his stand in front of the gallery, proceeded to fling the viands into the body of the church, which was the signal for a most unseemly scramble among the qualified recipients. It became, in fact, a sporting event, looked forward to as much by the stock-owners who formed the audience as by the less fortunate competitors who leaped and fought among the pews.

The natives of the Forest of Dean, like those of Wyre and Bewdley on the Severn, only more so, were a race unto themselves. In former days they seem to have been regarded by the people of the open country as something of barbarians. Forgers and smelters of iron who lived in the dark woods under forest customs were likely enough to develop characteristics that to the ploughman seemed alien and uncanny. A great deal, too, of the oak for the navy came from hence. All along here, too, from Redbrook to the Wye's mouth, the river formed not merely an ancient fighting boundary between Welsh and English and their predecessors of more

complicated classification, but from Edward I. to Henry VIII. (more or less) was the boundary, like the Monnow, between the England of Parliamentary representation and the running of the King's writ on the one side, and the ineffective absolutism of the Lord Marchers on the other, slightly sobered towards the end by the first efforts of the Court of the Marches at Ludlow in the early sixteenth century.

Where the tide, when in full flow, first smothers the last rocky rapids of the Wye's mountain waters and the mud begins to show an unwelcome glistening strip below the meadowy banks, is a fitting place to close this chapter. Not for a moment because this single blemish in the picture is accompanied by any deterioration of environment. On the contrary, with the touch of the tide, beautiful as the journey has thus far been, it might almost be urged, if comparisons were not infelicitous where variety is so infinite, that the last state of this final stage was even better than the first. Though we dropped, as it were, to the river above Bigsweir from the heights of Penallt and Trelleck upon the Monmouth shore, the highway runs from Redbrook upon the Gloucester bank and crosses the water by Bigsweir station. Nor ought I to omit

mention of the occasional country seats, of modest size, and for this reason in greater harmony, that make pleasing interludes from time to time upon one bank or the other beneath the everywhere afforested heights. The happy squatter, too, is still occasionally with us high up at the fringe of the woods as he was in the days of Wordsworth, who had an eye, if any one had, for a mountain cot, and did not fail to note them as he journeyed down this very road from Monmouth to Llandogo. The Wye of the Lake poet, to be sure, was always the Wye of summer time, not that of the flaming leaf, which, moved by the latest and freshest memories, we have chosen here for our pilgrimage, and would commend to any whom these pages may inspire to become pilgrims:

> The day is come when I again repose
> Here, under this dark sycamore and view
> These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,
> Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,
> Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves
> Among the woods and copses, nor disturb
> The wild green landscape. Once again I see
> These hedgerows, hardly hedgerows, little lines
> Of sportive wood run wild; these pastoral farms
> Green to the very door; and wreaths of smoke
> Sent up in silence from among the trees!
> With some uncertain notice, it might seem,
> Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods.

CHAPTER VI

TINTERN TO CHEPSTOW

A couple of miles below Llandogo an unsightly iron bridge has been thrown across the Wye to the small village of Brockweir on the farther bank. After this a sharp loop of the river bends to the west on which is set the hamlet of Tintern Parva. Half a mile on, at the return of the horseshoe loop, the houses of Tintern itself spread along the roadside. Both villages, though quite unremarkable, display, nevertheless, a rather pleasing irregularity of grey stone and white-wash, of thatch, flag and slate, intermingled with the always lavish abundance of fruit and flowers that blooms in the cottage gardens of this luxuriant clime. The hand of "mine host" and the humbler caterer is all over the village, but not particularly to its detriment in an æsthetic sense. There is lavish foliage, too, everywhere; while the efforts to

attract of the various hostelries and such like, mostly modest ones of reasonable age, are not devoid of such efforts as make, so far as possible, for harmony amid a scene where the responsibility should be great. At any rate, no ill-flavour is left by the row of straggling houses, as one passes out of them into the presence of the great and beautiful fabric that rises just beyond upon the river bank.

Tintern is, I think, more generally quoted as the gem of English monastic ruins than any other of its kind. The natural frame, amid which these stately remnants, not merely of an earlier, but of altogether another England are set, is an incalculable factor in such high appraisement. Amid the Abbeys of the north, for instance, Fountains stands supreme. Nor anywhere known to me do the achievements of the Georgian landscape-gardener on a great scale, with miles of wood and water, impress one more profoundly. As you wend your way through all this, admiring vastly, and dreaming a good deal, if you are given to dreams, the men and women of Pitt and Walpole's day will bear you insistent company, till you are suddenly brought with a jerk into the utterly conflicting splendour of the Middle Ages. Tintern neither

gains nor loses by the art of any succeeding century. Its environment, save in minor details, is much as it was when its vesper-bell echoed down the valley. The enveloping wood-clad hills are no tamer, while the Cistercian monks, thrifty farmers as they were, cut hay in the narrow meadows by the river-side much as men cut it to-day. The Wye, it is true, has at this point changed its clear and buoyant nature, and assumed the less alluring features of a tidal river. But taken as a whole, in conjunction with its perfect setting, Tintern probably merits the supremacy which seems so generally conceded to it.

As a fabric it is exceptionally complete. Cruciform in shape and of Early English and Decorated style, but few of the clustered columns and deep moulded pointed arches have fallen or been seriously defaced. It is indeed wonderfully preserved, and who shall say but the sun and moon, the stars and clouds are not as noble a canopy as its vanished roof, or as effective a background for the rich tracery still perfect in many of its windows as wood or glass or lead. The great Decorated west window is in this sense ideal. Yet as you stand beneath it and look up the long nave between its tall, graceful arcading, the vast

east window with nothing of its frame left but one long central mullion, the autumn woods and brilliant sky as I last saw it filling its shapely space, one is disposed to feel that even thus the ravage of time is not without its recompense. We know for a certainty that where the woods wave and the clouds chase over this empty Gothic frame were eight long mullions as now in the opposite window, and eight panes resplendent with the arms of Roger Bigod the actual founder of this church. The four arches, 70 feet high, that held the central tower are also intact. The body of the church is 228 and the transepts 150 feet long. The whole of the floor is carpeted with smooth turf, while up above, on arch and pillar, the ivy clusters or trails its long tendrils.[1] Ferns and flowers burst on all sides from the crevices, while the summit of the high roofless walls is feathered by wanderers from the woods around, little sprigs of ash, privet, or thorn that have taken root there, and wring a hard living out of the sacred stones. Without being in any way overloaded, or the beautiful proportions of these long vistas of Gothic architecture interfered with, nature has assuredly tricked out these time-worn walls with lavish and dainty hand. And if you

[1] Like Raglan and Goodrich Castles, Tintern has been restored. The loss of ivy is amply balanced by gains in other directions.

happen to be there alone and in the right season, the chorus of bird-song that fills the roofless arcades, and echoes up the long-drawn aisles, is sufficient evidence of what harbourage is afforded the singers in a hundred snug and inaccessible retreats.

Considerable remains of the domestic quarters show in the chapter-house and cloisters on the north side of the church. The first building was planted here, on the site now more or less occupied by the north transept, in 1131, by William Fitz-Richard, generally but inaccurately called Walter, de Clare, founder of the Abbey. This distinguished person was Lord of the Welsh March of Striguil, which took its name from the castle of Striguil, or Chepstow, and more or less coincided with the district known as Netherwent (or Nethergwent). It was a singularly compact domain, being the wedge between Wye and Usk, from Monmouth to the mouth of the river. Within this Walter Fitz-Richard was supreme, and no doubt, like other Lord Marchers whose predecessors had won the soil from the Welsh upon their own account, had his courts, his officials, his mint, his *jura regalia*, and the right of making war, for which last purpose with a small Norman and Anglo-Norman nucleus he had also

a strong array of Anglo-Welsh or conciliated Welshmen, who were skilled in the trade, and ready to follow him anywhere at any moment. But now he determined to have his own great church, and founded Tintern, introducing there those admirable farmers and business men, the Cistercians, who just at this time were taking root in many of the great monasteries such as Furness, Neath, and Margam.

The first founder, having attached himself to Stephen, died childless during the latter's war. The Lordship of Striguil, including Tintern, then passed through the hands of his nephew and great-nephew, the two Strongbows, Earls of Pembroke, and next through an heiress, to the first of the five Marshall brothers, who inherited and died childless one after the other, as was mentioned at Goodrich, which was one of the two chief castles of the Lordship. By a daughter of their house the southern part of the Lordship went to Hugh Bigod, third Earl of Norfolk. It was his son Roger who completed the present Abbey Church in 1287, just after Edward the First had crushed the last struggle for Welsh independence, and was endeavouring to abridge the power of the Lord Marchers, now, as he thought, to be of no more

THE FERRY AT TINTERN

use as buffers to the Crown. Tintern had been enriched, too, from another source; for the northern part of Striguil had gone to the Clares, Earls of Gloucester and Lords of Glamorgan, and that prodigiously powerful house gave substantial token of its new connection with the Abbey.

Roger, the builder, died without issue, but by prearrangement and for value received by Edward the First the Lordship went to the King's illegitimate son Thomas, created Earl of Norfolk. A hundred and thirty years later his descendant Mowbray, the fourth Duke, disposed of it, then shorn of all the rights and honours of a Marcher Lordship, to the Herberts, through whom it descended as ordinary property to the Beaufort family. From them Tintern and its surroundings, together with a vast deal of other Wye-side property, as we have already told, was taken over recently by the Crown. Its revenue at the Dissolution, when it went to the Beaufort family, was £256, a secondary foundation in the way of substance. Evesham and Worcester, for instance, which were of the first rank—speaking from memory, but with approximate accuracy—were about thrice as much. The monks of those days were no mere devotees. The Cistercians introduced into England methods of agriculture

far ahead of the native standards; above all, they were great graziers and, particularly, wool-producers. The monks of Tintern in 1291 had 3260 sheep and 100 cows, also tanneries and mills, as well as a forge in the Forest of Dean granted to them by the Earl of Hereford. Monastic farm accounts were kept with rigid accuracy; those of Worcester, the oldest, I believe, extant, and now being printed, are a good example of their type. Of fish, above all of the noblest of fishes, the monks of Tintern must have had abundance.

In an early eighteenth-century work on South Wales, for which I have otherwise a sincere regard, that of Thomas Roscoe, there is a delightful flash of unintentional humour, in which—good man—he seriously describes the monks of Tintern issuing from the water-gate, and casting *a dragon-fly* on the muddy tidal water of the adjacent river to catch their toll of salmon! Tintern was famed for its hospitality, but one may safely assert that if its refectory table had depended on such methods the guests would have gone away empty indeed. I make a present of this to all and sundry who, between Rhayader and Bigsweir, cast a salmon-fly on the river to-day.

Numbers of the illustrious men and women of

the Lordship of Striguil were buried in the Abbey, but the only effigy existing, and that a mutilated one now in the sacristy, is supposed to be that of Bigod. There are a great many curious stones, tiles, and such like, collected in the building, and the visitor may trace the foundations, and more than the foundations, of much of the adjoining precincts. But such details are always wearisome in the mere telling, except in their proper place, which is an archaeological publication or a local handbook.

Soon after leaving Tintern the road begins to sidle up the hill slope, and to keep henceforth at a sufficient height above the river, to give the traveller by it the most exquisite prospects of every kind that are afforded to any one upon wheels between Monmouth and Chepstow. In any case that prodigious extent of lofty cliff, draped after the fashion of the reaches about Symond's Yat, and, like those famous heights, buttressed with shaggy crags, generally known as the Wyndcliff, commences here. This stretch of the Wye from here to Chepstow may be styled the rival and complement of the other, for these two portions express together the most sublime effort of this loveliest of rivers. Which of them is entitled to

first rank, supposing such classification to be of any concern, it would be ill saying. Happily, though the materials which make for the splendour of either are the same, and the character of the scenery alike, the scale and grouping is rather different. The Wyndcliff is loftier, its breast broader, the immense expanse of woodland hanging from one sweep of hill, especially if you view it from above, is even more imposing. And no one, of course, has realised this Wyndcliff reach of the river till they have climbed to the parapet, jutting out from its summit, which can be approached in various ways, and is designed to give the finest *coup d'œil* that can be had of the valley from any single spot. Though the Chepstow road, cut along the side of the hill, yields no such prospect as its summit, there are some lovely peeps of the river below and the cliffs beyond. Its very passage through the dense growth of woodland gives much contrasting and delightful detail of foreground. The massive crags and ruddy walls of rock that abut upon the highway are richly embroidered with ground-ivy and mosses. Ferns break thickly out of the fissures. The beech underwood, in its autumn dress, rubbing shoulders everywhere with the dark-

ABOVE CHEPSTOW

green yews, hangs a clustering fringe over the brow of these warm-tinted barriers of rock. And beneath the clinging road there is, for the most part, a gorgeous confusion, a glorious tangle of every wood that grows,—beech and ash and oak, wych-elm, sycamore, and yew, all struggling and, as it were, wrestling with one another in their efforts to maintain a footing on the almost precipitous steeps that drop to the river below. If the Wyndcliff, rising on the west bank, and, after a long curve, thrusting up the high promontory which forces out the Wye, is magnificent, the opposite and eastern bank does something more than maintain the high standard of its whole character from Monmouth downwards. For nearly the whole way to the great curve of the river, under the Wyndcliff, the wooded heights of Tiddenham Chase, mantling above the long wall of Plumer's Cliffs, spring high on the Gloucester bank.

I have said nothing of the parting view of Tintern Abbey, as you rise the long slope on the Chepstow road; nor yet of the still more beautiful prospects of it from a dozen different perches on the hills above. The wise man will elect to tarry for a space at the Beaufort Arms at Tintern, and pursue the delightful woodland paths which

here, as at Symond's Yat, afford some days of varied walking amid delicious scenes. Upon the Chepstow road, just beneath the Wyndcliff, a rustically decorated habitation, known as Moss Cottage, stands at the entrance to a woodland walk cut to the top of the heights early in the last century, by the Duke of Beaufort, for the benefit of visitors. For the Wyndcliff rears its long broken ridge nearly a thousand feet above the river, and that seems a great height and is extraordinarily effective in the downward prospect, when much of the fall is precipitous, and all is clad from base to summit in wild woodland, ablaze with the radiant tints of autumn under a brilliant sun. I think, upon the whole, there is nothing else upon the Lower Wye, nothing I have seen in all England, of the kind quite equal to this really glorious spectacle.

In the first place, though all mixed woodland on hill-sides is beautiful, this Wye-side woodland is the most fascinating blend of colour, and the most absolutely natural and wayward in the way it grips the mountain in dense and mysterious tangle, known to me. As are the woods around Symond's Yat, such are these that here spread for many miles along the Wyndcliff. As on the

inspection parapet one is swung out, as it were, above them, and above a great deal that is exquisite beyond them, I should like to hazard the statement again that the impression made is that of being in the presence of a picture that is somehow unlike anything one has seen before, and I am bold enough to fancy that the more the spectator has seen, the more likely he is to feel this way. The particular impression made by the prospect can be described neither by pen nor brush. I have felt it in precisely the same degree, upon every occasion, at intervals of years; intervals, too, of association with the best of what this island has to show. As in the reaches above Monmouth, only more so from the increase of scale, it is the exquisite combination of two contrasting elements, those of the mountain and of the warm, sheltered lowland, that strike so rare a note. Wooded mountain slopes drop into richly-tinted valleys all over the highland parts of England and Wales, but nowhere, within my knowledge, such woods as these, nor such a sea of varied leaf, nor such a continual blending of fantastic crag with radiant foliage as there is here in autumn upon the Wye.

Indeed the whole of this is a gigantic freak of nature. South and north, one might fancy, are

here thrown violently and unexpectedly into one another's arms, and together mingle in a beautiful confusion that has no exact equivalent anywhere else in the kingdom. The singular contortions of the Wye which break out again in a succession of loops help no little in this extraordinary scene. Looking down from the Wyndcliff, where birds are scurrying over the radiant tree-tops far below, the river courses down from the cliffs under Tiddenham Chase, and describes a great loop where, in the very lap of hanging woods and soaring cliffs, lies the peninsular farm and parish of Llancaut—several hundred acres of gracious pasture and ruddy tillage fields, constituting at once a single farm and an entire parish, with one residence, a diminutive church, and practically no population—while the river sweeps round it, with the bare cliffs of Ban-y-gor, their pink and grey colouring hanging high above the more distant waters of the succeeding bend. But one is here sufficiently lifted up to look away over all this rugged chaos of the middle distance to the gleaming coils of the Wye in the flats beyond, stealing towards their junction with the Severn, which lays its own broad waters wide open to the view. Upon its farther shores the ridges of the Cotswolds are rolling southward, and

the hills beyond them fading away towards Bristol and the Avon's mouth, where the Channel, or in more euphonious phrase, the Severn-sea, actually begins. It is not the extent, however, of this outlook from the Wyndcliff that makes it famous, but its wonderful composition; the rapid transition from the sublime grandeur, the brilliant colouring of foreground, and the deep-channelled imprisoned mazes through which the river, far below, seems making hopeless quest for an escape to the sudden break from this radiant confusion of crag and wood into the absolute levels, the far-spreading green and tawny flats of the Severn's estuary.

The Chepstow road which sidles, as already told, along the lower slopes of this wilderness of hanging woodland amid continuous charms of foreground detail and no stint of more spacious views, over the Wye, leaves both in due course, and cuts inland by the village of St. Arvans to its destination; a proceeding due to the high promontory of Piercefield, which forces the river away to the north-eastward for a mile, till under the high cliffs of Ban-y-gor it bends back for its last straight gorge-like stretch to Chepstow. The whole of this peninsula is a private demesne, but access to it on application is never, I believe, refused,

and in any case is free on certain days of the week. This beautiful enclosure of Piercefield, covering some five hundred acres, and compactly occupying the promontory, is a delightful blend of undulating, park-like pasture and varied woodland, dipping to the river or pressing on to the verge of cliffs—at one point 200 feet in height—that overhang it. Winding walks through wood and glade lead from point to point, and at every one some further gem of river-scenery is disclosed, some fresh grouping of cliff, wood, and water, with Chepstow castle coming in anon as a new and inspiring feature, and quite ideal background. In connection with the laying out and adornment of this Piercefield estate, is a somewhat harrowing tale, and unhappily a not unique one, of a patriotic subject's treatment by an ungrateful country. The long-ago proprietor to whom Chepstow, the Wye, and the public, to say nothing of the present fortunate owner, owe so much in the matter of planting and landscape gardening, was a certain Valentine Morris, Governor of St. Vincent, the most beautiful of the Caribbean islands, from the year 1776 to its capture by the French in 1779.

This covered, of course, the first period of the American War of Independence, and at no other

in history have the British West Indies, then incomparably more valuable than now, been in such critical domestic plight from dislocated commerce, and in such frequent peril from open foes. Mr. Morris, it seems, concluding that the necessary defence of a valuable British possession was the first business of a British official in war time, and the finding of the money for it by the British crown a matter of course when opportunity allowed, put St. Vincent in fighting trim by the free expenditure of his own fortune. For apparently, like many another man standing in the breach, out on the fringes of the Empire, in those days and some later ones, he did not thoroughly understand the ways of St. James's. The island succumbed to a French attack in 1779, its defence being complicated by the temper of the fierce Caribbeans who had only recently been reduced to obedience, and now saw in the French their deliverers.

The Governor's claims for repayment, however, were persistently ignored by ministers, and this treatment involved him in sore financial straits. His creditors closed upon him and seized his person, and he languished for twelve years in the King's Bench prison. His wife went mad under these misfortunes, and when the persecuted ex-Governor

himself was at last released, broken in health and spirit, he survived but a short time, dying in a friend's house in London. He seems to have been greatly beloved in the neighbourhood of Chepstow, and on his departure for the West Indies the poor whom he had befriended went in flocks to bid him good-bye, and the bells of Chepstow rang muffled peals. This harrowing tale of the unmerited woes of a pro-consul lends a touch of sentiment to a ramble amid the groves he planted and the walks he laid out.

The heights on the western bank of the Wye virtually terminate at Chepstow, the castle standing on the brink of the last bit of cliff from fifty to a hundred feet above the river, while the town lies below on a gentle slope beside its bank. On the Gloucester shore, however, precipitous heights, for some distance falling sheer into the water, confront the town, and continue for a shorter space below it. The present name of Chepstow only dates from the fourteenth century. Till then, since the town's origin, which seems to have been due to the Norman castle, it had been known as Striguil, giving that title, as we have seen, to its tributary Lordship. Chepe-stow as a name, being simply the Saxon for *market town*, may possibly have an

CHEPSTOW CASTLE

older origin, as one of the very few Saxon settlements over the Welsh Border appears to have been in this neighbourhood on the west bank of the Wye. Striguil, however, signifying "Castle of the Crook," was the British designation for whatever fortress preceded this one, till at length, in later times, it gradually gave way to the name of the town, as the latter had originally taken the name of the castle, and Striguil strikes one as probably capricious in its spelling. It sounds like a compromise, and must be so, since those who have delved closely in the ancient history of the place have discovered seventy different ways of spelling it! It seems quite possible that this astonishing want of unanimity drove the natives in despair to the simpler Saxon equivalent of Chepe-stow. Even the phonetic calligraphy of the medieval clerk could not ring the changes very far on that.

Chepstow is altogether a cheerful, sunny, and reposeful haven, in no way jarring on the exalted standard of the environment it is expected to live up to. The High Street climbs through its heart up a gentle slope—and culminates most appropriately in an embattled arched gateway, the old entry to the town rebuilt in the time of Henry VII., while a section of the old port wall is still standing.

Down towards the oldest quarter, and the river-side wharves there are quaint narrow streets, containing many small, massive, low-browed houses obviously ripe in years, but displaying little of the style and decoration that so often belongs to antiquity, though some picturesque almshouses make brief exception to the rule. The margin of the river, too, has a sleepy, bygone look, with just a touch of the seafaring atmosphere about it, though I have never myself seen much press of sea-borne commerce here ; and the watermen, who stand about in quasi-sailor fashion, are probably more concerned with the prospect of rowing you up on the flowing tide to the foot of the Wyndcliff, than facing the terrors of the somewhat distant deep.

It is a striking bit of water-way though, these reddish grey cliffs rising sheer out of the river on the farther bank, and the great castle perched on its crags, a few hundred yards up the nearer one. The river, too, it is said, rises and falls more in a single tide than any other in the kingdom, as much, on some occasions, as 46 feet. A road and a railway bridge both cross here to the Gloucester shore, and neither of them can well avoid a rather painfully modern intrusion upon a scene where the atmosphere generally savours strongly

of the picturesque or of the past. But the road bridge is a reasonably graceful structure, and the prospect up-stream from its centre, of the castle, and its noble background, is wholly charming. The parish church of such a place as Chepstow could not avoid being interesting. Originally a Benedictine priory, it is now, in truth, a remarkable blend of the Norman artist, the churchwarden-cum-Wyatt vandalism, and the enlightened restricted modern restorer. On approaching the west front you may well think that a treat lies in store, for a truly beautiful specimen of Norman work in the shape of a deeply recessed and moulded doorway, and a triple window to match above it, leaves absolutely nothing to be desired. But on further proceeding either to the right or left it is not too much to say that the lamentable contrast at once encountered is not easily to be forgotten, and the shock thus administered is the joint work of an architect of deplorable memory and a bishop who in the pastoral department of his profession was a deserving person. Within, however, the nave still shows its Norman origin, and there are a couple of tombs of uncommon historical interest, the best carrying effiges of Henry Somerset, second Earl of Worcester, and his wife. The Earl was a friend of

Henry the Eighth, and was one of the challengers at the Field of the Cloth of Gold. The other tomb is that of Henry Marten, one of the regicides, who was confined in Chepstow Castle in a free and easy fashion for twenty years, and was ultimately laid to rest in the chancel. From hence he was unearthed at a later day, as unworthy of such sacred soil, by a hyper-sensitive vicar, and deposited in a less exclusive spot.

The stout old puritan, however, died quite unrepentant of his regicidal act, as the epitaph here written by himself makes honest avowal. There was once a central tower, and the fact is only worthy of remark because it fell down with a crash in the year 1700, and this again is interesting merely from the frequency of such catastrophes, not for their singularity. For the percentage of medieval church towers in England that thus hurled themselves to destruction, to the infinite damage of their churches, would amaze the public unversed in ecclesiology, if it could be computed.

But the great castle of Striguil is of course the glory of Chepstow and indeed of the Wye. For no other, on its whole course, presents to-day such an ample display of tower, battlement, and curtain, nor is any so imposingly planted. On a high

grassy knoll its eastern and southern sides command the river and the lower part of the town respectively, while its own remaining buildings run back up the brink of an ascending cliff, which, as already described, drops sheer into the water and made the fortress impregnable upon that side, as well as noble to look upon to-day. Conspicuously overlooking the town is its portcullised gateway, protected on either side by drum towers. The lofty curtain wall is still perfect round the exposed eastern and southern fronts, though bulging out greatly on the latter, while at the angle a large round tower seems to bind the masonry together. Where the dry moat ran on these vulnerable sides, and all over the green dingle which picturesquely intervenes, between the feet of the old fortress and the town are groves of trees making a pleasing girdle of foliage for the better display of the ancient towers which rise above them. Narrow as is the limestone ridge up which the four succeeding courts of the castle climb, it covers nearly three acres of ground. A terrace walk ascends by steps from court to court, amid the fragments of towers and residential quarters, giving this long, narrow fortress a character all its own. The highest surviving building, and the most conspicuous from a distance, is known

as the Chapel, but was in fact first the keep and then the banqueting-hall, though the lower part may have at one time constituted the Chapel. The downward prospect from the shattered windows, or from the foundations of the ruined walls, on to the deep swift sides of the river washing the base of the cliff a hundred feet below, adds no little to the effect that this old castle of Striguil must produce on all who make its acquaintance.

With regard to its story, some of it is included in what has been said in a former chapter concerning Tintern, the Abbey church of the Lordship, of which Chepstow was the headquarters. We may pass over the shadowy traces or traditions of Roman and Saxon occupation of this rock of Striguil. But Fitz-Osborne, who was responsible for the germ at least of Chepstow Castle, was a person of singular interest. For it was by his advice that the daring stroke of William the Bastard against England was made. It was Fitz-Osborne, who, when the victory was won, and its fruits mostly gathered, came down to the West to complete matters and crush the resistance of the West Mercians and the Border Welsh, who had sunk their differences in the sudden and appalling cataclysm that had struck dumb and helpless the

island of Britain. Fitz-Osborne, who had been Count of Breteuil and Ivry in Normandy, and was now Earl of Hereford, built many castles on the Border, and completed the Saxon conquest up to the Wye, though most of the building we now see is of thirteenth-century date.

The conquest of Wales, as we have already had occasion to remind the reader, was altogether another affair, and was not commenced till the next reign, and then upon a different principle. Chepstow was one of the bases of attack for that protracted business, and gathers further interest upon this account. Its impregnable character, as well as its situation in the hindermost line of castles, while in the hands of the Clares and others already recounted, seems to have kept it tolerably immune from those lively scenes which give zest to the tale of most Border castles. The Welsh never captured it; neither of the Llewelyns nor yet Owen Glyndwr ever scaled its walls. But it was the depot of fighting men, and of stores and engines of war for generations; for there was an old bridge crossing the river here in place of the modern iron one, and a ford at low tide connected it with the Roman road from Gloucester to Caerwent, which gave it immediate access to the realm of England proper.

A touch of sentiment is supplied by the sojourn here, for a short time, of the hapless Edward II. on that strange series of forlorn adventure in South Wales that terminated in his tragic death at Berkeley Castle.

It is during the civil wars of King and Parliament, though, that Chepstow mainly figures as a fighting fortress. Like every place in Wales and the Marches it stood for the King, but after a four days' siege by Colonel Morgan from the Parliamentary garrison at Gloucester surrendered unconditionally, and received a Roundhead garrison. Two years later it was betrayed by one of the soldiers to a party of Royalists under Sir Nicholas Kemyes, who captured the garrison in their beds. This officer remained as Governor, till in the following year, 1648, the last of the war, Cromwell himself on his way to Pembroke sat down before it, and failing to carry it by assault, left Colonel Ewer to continue the siege with a train of artillery, seven companies of foot, and four troops of horse; the defenders in the meantime only numbering 160. When a gaping breach had been pounded in the walls on the town side, the Governor was summoned to surrender. After eighteen days his provisions were exhausted, but Kemyes refused all

terms except that of marching out with the honours of war, which was not to be thought of. He and his garrison, however, had an alternative in some boats moored under the castle walls. But a Parliamentary soldier swam the river with a knife in his teeth and cut their cables. The castle was now carried by assault, and Sir Nicholas and forty of his men killed. It was granted to Cromwell, but at the Restoration went back to the family of the Marquis of Worcester.

All the men of might, however, who have flourished through ages at Chepstow have been apparently thrust under by Henry Marten, who has been established by the guide-books, at any rate, as the *genius loci* of the castle. He is more recent, and sounds more human, perhaps, than those grim mailed figures, if they really were grim, who could shake the throne of England when they set their minds to it.

Henry Marten, as a signer of the King's death-warrant, was imprisoned at Chepstow till his death there twenty years after, as related. The public outside the neighbourhood, at any rate, of every generation, seem to have pictured the hapless captive looking through his dungeon bars at the remorseless river gliding beneath. Even Southey

wrote some verses on his pitiful situation, thus severed for years from the very light of day:

> Not to him
> Did Nature's fair varieties exist.
> He never saw the sun's delightful beams
> Save when through yon high bars he poured a sad
> And broken splendour.

As a matter of fact the old gentleman, who had been held, even by his own party, in no great esteem, had a very good time of it; admirable rooms, rent free, in a noble baronial hall, with the solace of his wife and family, and as much other society as he fancied. His movements seem to have been but little restricted. He was obviously good company, and dined out in the neighbourhood, where his steady refusal to drink the reigning King's health, and his outspoken contumacy as regards the other business, were not held against him.

There are a great many places of interest in the neighbourhood of Chepstow. The celebrated Roman station of Caerwent is only five miles away. Matherne, the old fortified palace of the bishops of Llandaff for three centuries, and now carefully preserved as a private residence, is nearer still. But we must not at this late stage, with our space exhausted, wander away from the Wye, above

all, to places that demand whole chapters to themselves. We may most fittingly take leave of the river by the curious little hamlet of Beachley, with its pebble shore standing on the neck of land protruding into the Severn, where the Wye finishes her long and matchless pilgrimage, and mingles her waters with those of the greater sister she parted from in infancy on the brown slopes of old Plinlimmon, their common cradle.

> There twice a day the Severn fills,
> The salt sea-water passes by,
> And hushes half the babbling Wye,
> And makes a silence in the hills.

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